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THESE LYNNEKERS

J. D. BERESFORD



BY J. D. BERESFORD

THESE LYNNEKERS

THE EARLY HISTORY OF JACOB STAHL

A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH

THE INVISIBLE EVENT

THE HOUSE IN DEMETRIUS ROAD

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

THESE LYNNEKERS

BY

J. D. BERESFORD

AUTHOR OF "THE EARLY HISTORY OF JACOB STAHL,"

"A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH," ETC., ETC.



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TO MY SON

“ fling away ambition;
By that sin fell the angels”

HENRY VIII

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CONTENTS

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE EQUATION	11
II OAKSTONE	22
III LAISSEZ FAIRE	42
IV THE LYNNEKER METHOD	63
V MEDBOROUGH	78
VI THE BEGINNING OF REASON	91
VII EDWARD	106
VIII MRS. LYNNEKER	119
IX GEORGE SMITH	146
X THE GOD OUT OF MAYFAIR	174
XI ADELA	219
XII BRIAN LESSING	257

BOOK TWO

XIII JULY, 1903	301
XIV THE NEW OAKSTONE	333
XV SIBYL	354
XVI THE HERMIT	394
XVII THE MISSING INDUCTION	411
XVIII THE TWO SACRAMENTS	437
XIX THE LYNNEKER FAMILY	449

BOOK ONE

THESE LYNNEKERS

I

THE EQUATION

I

YOU might tell young Dickie I want him," Latimer said. "He's in the stable, making a rabbit-hutch."

"I'm going the other way." Adela's errand was too important to be postponed by carrying messages between her younger brothers; and the stables were at least fifty yards in the wrong direction. "I'm taking this soup to old Mrs. Oliver," she explained. "I shall be going out by the top gate."

Latimer grudgingly conceded the importance of the can his sister exhibited. "I'm swatting up these beastly maths for my scholarship," he said, dropping from the urgency of his first command.

Adela at seventeen had developed a difficult independence. As her skirts grew longer and her hair crept up by slow stages so that now the tail of it hung scarcely lower than the collar of her braided jacket, she had come to exhibit an incomprehensible contrariety. Even Edward, two years her senior, dignified by the fact that he had left school last term and was going up to Cambridge in October, found that diplomacy had had to take the place of command. Adela was, according to Edward, evolving a temperament. She was learning to play the organ and had already publicly performed "Hill's March" as a voluntary after evening service.

"Awful swat," Latimer continued, tactfully working upon his sister's sympathies. "I'm no earthly good at maths, but I have to get up enough just to pass in 'em. And I wanted young Dickie to explain something. He's good at this rotten stuff," he added, with a hint of contempt to cover the indignity of appealing for help to a kid of fourteen in the junior school.

"No good looking at me, I can't explain them," Adela replied, with the superiority of the recently acclaimed artist.

Latimer leant back in his chair and yawned, and then hastily sat forward again. "This chair's awfully rocky," he remarked. "The whole affair'll come to pieces one of these days." He got up and roughly pulled the back up to its normal angle again. "I suppose I'd better go and get young Dickie," he said. "He might do something to this bally chair, too."

"I'll tell him if you like," Adela conceded.

"Oh! don't bother," protested Latimer.

"It's all right," Adela said.

She left her soup can on the dining-room table.

Latimer investigated the contents with faint disgust; strolled over to the window, and then returned to a contemplation of his algebra.

II

"Good Lord, you *are* in a muck," was his greeting to the obedient Dickie.

Dickie frowned impatiently. He had been called away from the construction of what promised to be an unusually respectable rabbit-hutch, at that most interesting stage when the thing begins to take shape, and all the hard work of the patient young carpenter is rewarded by the delight of fitting and fastening his creation into the ideally conceived form.

"Am I?" he asked, and picked a shaving from a crease in his waistcoat. "What did you want me for?"

"Your hair's full of chips," commented Latimer fastidiously.

Dickie's hair was a reproach to the whole Lynneker family. It was quite too exuberant; and all the gibes of Edward, Adela and Latimer were insufficient to keep it cropped closely enough to hide a tendency to wave. Dickie's hair had never curled, but when it was permitted to grow it fell into the conventional tumultuous masses of sculpture.

"Oh! I can't help it," protested Dickie. "Does it matter? I'm going back directly. What did you want me for?"

"Look here, you're getting most confoundedly cheeky, you young beggar," Latimer advised him; and Dickie, well drilled as became the youngest of a family of five, set his mouth firmly and attempted no reply.

"Apologise!" commanded Latimer.

"I'm sorry," Dickie said, so perfunctorily that his brother might have demanded fuller satisfaction had he not had a favour to ask. In the circumstances, he thought it wiser to appear mollified.

"Look here," he began, "I wish you'd have a squint at this filthy quadratic. I can't see what's wrong with it. Number 23," he went on, pushing the book and his own paper of figures towards his brother. "I'll swear I've stated it all right."

Dickie was in a hurry and wasted no time. He read the example aloud in an undertone, and then fixed his eyes vacantly on the mantelpiece opposite.

"You must make 'x' equal the single file," he said; "then 'x²' will equal the company; and . . ."

Latimer interrupted him. "I have," he said caustically. "Don't you think you might look at my working?"

Dickie submissively picked up his brother's calculations and went through them. "It's all right," he announced. "The answer's 16. What's the matter with it?"

"There's a mistake somewhere," Latimer said resolutely. He had authority in store, but he preferred to reserve it

for a time. Young Dickie was so cocksure about his mathematics; it would be a distinct score to let him thoroughly commit himself before producing the crushing evidence.

Dickie impatiently ran through his brother's calculations a second time. "It's perfectly all right," he said.

"Well, I tell you it isn't," Latimer returned. "If you want to know, the answer's '19.'"

Dickie shook his head. "It's '16,'" he affirmed. "It must be. You can prove it."

"Prove away, you young ass," sneered Latimer. "Only perhaps you might take the trouble to look it up in the answers to examples."

Dickie obediently turned to the end of the book and made a careful comparison of the characteristic figures of the example and the key.

Latimer had the tip of his tongue between his teeth. His eyes gloated on the prospect of his brother's humiliation.

"It must be a misprint," Dickie said.

For a moment Latimer was speechless with amazement. This, indeed, was the climax of Dickie's infatuation.

"Good Lord, you little fool," he gasped, struggling to find some adequate expression for the immensity of his contempt; "you don't mean to say you know better than the book?"

Dickie was slightly abashed, but still persistent. "Well, the answer must be '16,'" he submitted.

"But it isn't, you cuckoo, it's '19,'" Latimer shouted vehemently.

Dickie pushed his fingers through his hair, came across a chip which he put in his mouth, and then dropped to a dogged statement of the fact that the figure "19" did not satisfy the equation.

"You're too infernally cocky," was Latimer's counterblast. He was righteously indignant. If Dickie were going to question the sacred pronouncements of Todhunter, the whole system of authority would be threatened. Moreover, Latimer had greater faith in the printed figure than in Dickie's powers of discretion. Algebra examples and ex-

amination papers were like other incomprehensible eruditions, they had some esoteric quality; they asked questions or made assertions that were beyond the understanding. And if they were questioned on common grounds the enquirer found himself held up to scorn as an ignorant fool who could not read the subtle, and incidentally unimpeachable mysteries that underlay the surface statement.

Dickie's expression pathetically asked when he might be allowed to return to his rabbit-hutch. He had done his best. If his brother foolishly persisted in accepting an impossible figure in face of certain evidence, no one could help him.

"Can I go, Latimer?" he asked.

Latimer scowled. "Not till you say you're wrong," he said.

"But I'm not wrong," Dickie rather quaveringly asserted; and the wrangle began again.

"Can't you see, you young ass, that the answer's '19'?"

"But it won't work."

"It would if you understood the question, only you don't. You're so confoundedly cocksure." And then rising to the pitch of querulous indignation, the note of one who would passionately defend authority and has no argument, Latimer went on: "Why, great Scott, if you're calmly going to say that every answer in the key's wrong when it doesn't agree with your own, what *on earth's* the good of—of anything? I mean what's the good of having algebra at all, you idiot?"

"It's only *one* answer."

"How do you know? Have you tried them all?"

"I say, Latimer, can't I go, now?"

"Is the answer '19' or '16'?"

Dickie weighed the chances of a surely permissible expediency before he decided that he could not deny the validity of his own intellectual processes.

"'19' won't work," he said.

Latimer jumped to his feet and caught him by the wrist.

"Oh! shut up, Latimer," protested Dickie, as his right arm was twisted behind his back.

"Admit you're wrong, then."

"But '19' . . . oh! Latimer, shut up, you're hurting most frightfully."

"Admit you're wrong!"

III

Those two years in Latimer's favour had given him the right to bully. Dickie's occasional resentments in moments of passion, his weak physical oppositions, had always resulted in more drastic lickings, a deeper ignominy. The convention had been established in the nursery: Latimer was older and taller than Dickie, Latimer was, therefore, stronger and had autocratic powers when the two brothers were alone. And until last holidays the convention had worked agreeably enough. The two boys had had common ground in defending themselves against Edward; and although they had never formed an offensive alliance against him, nor even developed their defensive tactics to the point of rescuing one another from an occasional licking, they had been united by their sense of playing on the same side.

But a recognisable breach had begun to open between Latimer and Dickie during the Easter holidays. Latimer was becoming suddenly adult, and had gone over to the enemy; and he and Edward had developed what Dickie considered to be the nasty habit of continually sharing some joke from which he was always excluded.

That new alliance had thrown Dickie upon his own resources. He played cricket or tennis with the other two, but he was being relegated to the position of a junior whose duty it was to fag; a duty that he consciously resented. In the old days he and Latimer had had a remedy; under great provocation from Edward they could declare a strike, could down tools, and go off to an improvised game of their own. And, in effect, Dickie had adopted the same compromise, and more particularly during this summer holiday, by finding a resource in the pleasures of carpentry. It is true

that he was not safe, that the use of the tools might be forbidden, since they belonged according to tradition to his elder brothers; but he had exhibited a skill and diligence in the mending and making of rabbit-hutches that had enlisted his mother's unsolicited support. And when Latimer interfered with Dickie's peaceful occupation on the ground that he was spoiling the tools, he could plead that he was making something for mother, and if the thing was not completed Mrs. Lynneker would inevitably intervene to plead in her gentle nervous way for her own rights, if not for Dickie's.

On occasion Latimer or Edward had sought to circumvent this diplomacy by finishing the job themselves, but they were both as clumsy with their hands as Dickie was skilful; while it was unbearable to work under a little brother's silent criticism of their incompetence. So, in the course of five weeks, Dickie had established a right to the use of the stable-building that was used as a workshop—a right that he had earned by craftsmanship—and the breach between him and Latimer had widened and friction had increased.

Latimer's reaction to the new relationships had shown itself in an access of spitefulness. He resented his brother's proficiencies in handicraft, in mathematics and in such games as chess and draughts, and sought to establish a balance by bullying him. Latimer had the autocrat's natural fear of a possible rival, and had been driven back to force in order to maintain his dignities.

And, now, on this eventful morning, he was to learn that he could rely no longer even on seniority to uphold his rule. He was three inches taller than his brother, but he was slightly built, while Dickie was broad-shouldered and sturdy and altogether in better physical condition.

"Admit you're wrong!" Latimer insisted and pressed his authority to the breaking point.

Dickie began his revolution by strategy. He yelped alarmingly, and risking further agony, gave way suddenly at the knees. Latimer was startled into releasing his over-

whelming advantage, and let go his hold of the tortured, twisted arm.

For a few seconds Dickie squatted on the floor rubbing his elbow and shoulder, and then, shuffling a little away from his tyrant, regained his feet.

"Admit you're wrong," Latimer began once again threateningly, but Dickie set his mouth and glared defiance.

"I'm right," he said resolutely. "It's a misprint. Any one can see that '19' won't work—it hasn't got a square root to begin with."

Latimer wisely avoided the controversial point. "Come here!" he commanded brutally.

"I shan't," replied Dickie.

"Do you want the worst licking you've ever had in all your life?"

"No, I don't, and you're not going to give it me, either."

Latimer realised that he must lose his temper. He was afraid. It is so difficult to begin an attack on a passive antagonist, and Latimer was too civilised to risk a straight blow at Dickie's undefended face. Refined tortures like the twisting of an arm could be carried by controllable degrees to almost any length, but the contrast between that method and the deliberate frontal attack marks the difference between nervous civilisation and irresponsible savagery.

"Infernal cheek!" Latimer shouted.

Dickie stared in resolute silence, his mouth set, his hands loosely clenched.

Latimer came one step nearer and made a snatch at Dickie's wrist. Dickie backed a little and that movement made a beginning possible.

"Come here!" shouted Latimer, and achieved the loss of temper that could alone carry him over the difficult sticking point.

He made a rush, Dickie ducked, and then the two boys clenched, and the fight resolved itself into a wrestling match, Latimer hitting wildly and ineffectively whenever he could get a hand free, an error in tactics that was partly responsible for his downfall.

He came down on his back and his head bumped resoundingly on a floor quite inefficiently padded by a string carpet. It occurred to him that it might be good policy to lie still. He had come startlingly to a realisation of the fact that "that young beggar Dickie was most beastly strong," and thought he might be decently relieved from further assertions of his superiority at that moment by the pretence of being slightly stunned.

He kept his eyes shut and awaited some cowardly prosecution of the initiative, but when the interval of silence had been unendurably prolonged, a furtive return to consciousness discovered that Dickie was sitting on the edge of the table and staring imperturbably out of the window.

Latimer was gravely disconcerted. No really promising plan of action suggested itself. He shirked the effort entailed by an elaborate assumption of a recovery from unconsciousness; and could think of no sound argument to demonstrate the unquestionable fact that he had been most unfairly handled.

"Rotten little cad," he said at last. He made the statement judicially, as one who is above contradiction. He remained on the floor, with his hands now under his head, which he was sure must have been badly bruised although it had not begun to hurt as yet.

Dickie continued to stare, a little moodily, out of the window.

"That's all rot," he said calmly. He was trying to understand all that this victory of his might connote. During that decisive encounter he had realised for the first time that he was a strong and capable fighter. And that knowledge set him free. He was no longer a fag. He did not wish to take any undue advantage of the fact, but he felt that it must be clearly ratified.

"Rotten little cad," Latimer repeated steadily. It was quite evident that he had found his line, and meant to continue his assertion indefinitely without regard to any possible argument.

"Oh! all right," Dickie said. "I'm a cad if you like.

You bumped my head against the stable wall last holidays, but I suppose that doesn't count. Anyway you're licked, and I can lick you again when I want to, and I'm not going to fag for you any more or do any other jolly thing for you if I don't want to. And the answer to that equation is '16,' I don't care what the key says; and I'm going back to finish my hutch."

He did not wait to receive a reply to this bold claim for independence. He got out of the room as quickly as he could, blundering a little as was his habit, and left his announcement to sink in.

IV

He came back to his work with a sense of elation. He was aware that he had conquered something stronger than his brother's physical or mental opposition. He had scored in some way, he thought, by carrying his victory to a definite conclusion. He had been tempted to be magnanimous when he had thrown Latimer, to be what both his brothers would have called "decent" about it; and instead of giving way to the impulse he had sat on the table and had argued the point out with himself. Nevertheless he had funked again when it came to asserting his right to the fruits of victory. All his home-training, all the example of his family,—with the possible exception of Adela—had urged him to take the easier course, to relinquish his advantage for the sake of re-establishing friendly relations. And he was glad, now, that he had resisted the temptation. He felt strong and assertive, ready to go out again and begin the battle afresh. He did not know that he had conquered the Lynneker weakness, but he was definitely aware of a sense of victory. . . .

He looked up from his work half an hour later to see Latimer thoughtfully kicking a stone round and round the stable yard. Presently he dribbled the stone to the door of the outhouse.

Dickie looked at him boldly, but Latimer's eyes were ap-

parently concerned with anything but his brother's face.

"Nearly finished?" he asked.

"Nearly," Dickie replied.

"I expect dinner's about ready. Hadn't you better wash?"

"Oh! hang! I suppose I had. I shan't be half a tick."

"The mater's in."

"All right. I'm coming."

Dickie laid his chisel carefully on the old table that served as a bench and began to dab at the sawdust on his waistcoat.

"I say, look here," began Latimer.

"What?" asked Dickie with a touch of defiance.

"You're not going to tell Edward we had a row?"

"Well, rather not. Why should I?"

"I don't know." Latimer had picked up a bradawl and was absently stabbing at a loose board.

Dickie suffered another qualm before he said, "Oh! look out, I'm going to use that wood, and you'll smash the bradawl if you're not careful." He felt that he was taking an unfair advantage of Latimer's magnanimity in overlooking recent insults.

Latimer put down the bradawl and went over to the door. He stood on the threshold with his hands in his pockets, kicked the door-post undecidedly, and then said:

"You aren't going to be a young ass, are you?"

"No, I don't think so," replied Dickie, after a moment's hesitation. "But I'm not a bit sorry I licked you this morning. I'm sick of being kicked about all over the shop, and I meant what I said about jolly well not fagging any more."

Latimer began to whistle. "As long as you don't put on side," he remarked; and Dickie knew that he had won that bout, and that he might, if he cared, do anything with a family whose chief concern was the desire for friendly relations.

All the fret and bother of open quarrels required so much effort.

Neither Dickie nor Latimer mentioned the equation again.

II

OAKSTONE

I

ACCORDING to the diagnosis of his form-master, Dickie "went stale" at the age of fifteen. The lower fifth was the recognised dead end at Oakstone; "boys of a certain type," as Wickford classified them, reached the privileges of the lower fifth by a splendid effort and stayed there till they left. But Dickie astonishingly stuck in the form below, known in those days as "the Remove"; and all Mr. Wickford's exertions failed to push him on into the upper school. A phrase had to be found to explain this almost unprecedented failure.

Joyce, another permanent resident in the Remove, was easily accounted for. His proper place, if learning were the test of position, was in some shameful depth of ignorance among children of ten and eleven. He was put in the Remove, mainly for æsthetic reasons. A young man of five foot ten with explorable hair on his upper lip, destroyed the symmetry and offended the decency of the lower second. Joyce's limitations had been fully comprehended before he had been at Oakstone for three terms—a less generalised psychology would have explained them in a week, and might possibly have found an outlet for him—and he was perfectly comfortable in his accredited seat at the bottom of the form; an old resident of years' standing, who, despite his many obvious stupidities, was quite able to enter into the spirit of the witticism when Wickford sought to enliven a dull ten minutes by casually asking him a question. Joyce had become a stock joke to be endlessly elabo-

rated, and he smiled complacently at his own undignified uses. Every one knew that he had a bad negro strain in him. The majority of the boys were quite ignorant of his surname, and an innocent new master had once entered him as "Nigger, H. L." on the class list.

Lynneker II was in another category.

Mr. James had passed him up from "the fourth" with his usual summary of potentialities. "A hopeless duffer at classics," James wrote, "and has no memory for English subjects such as history and geography, but promises to be a fair mathematician. He has not the intelligence of either of his two elder brothers, nor has he their general characteristic teachableness; but he is on the whole a nice, well-behaved boy, although ferociously obstinate in some respects." ("Ferocious" was James's pet adjective; he had been known to describe a boy as "ferociously placid.")

Wickford was not discouraged by this report. He had had worse cases that had not destroyed his reputation for being able to whip any boy into the lower fifth in three terms at the outside. But when Dickie had hung, suspended in mid-class, for nearly two years, a phrase had to be found to account for the unusual phenomenon of a reasonably intelligent boy staying in the Remove.

"He seems to have gone stale," Wickford humbly confessed to the head, and after a short discussion the Head decided to write to Lynneker's father.

The drastic remedy suggested in that letter brought consternation to the Lynneker family. Dr. Barnard, with a thoughtless brevity, had proposed to put Dickie on the "Modern Side." As a prescription, it would probably have failed to stimulate Dickie in that fallow period of his early puberty. The subjects taught on the Modern Side at Oakstone under Barnard, differed mainly by the substitution of French and German for Latin and Greek. Science was distantly acknowledged by a few perfunctory classes in inorganic chemistry, and mathematics were extended to include dynamics, statics and trigonometry. But the classic tradition had affected the whole principle of the teaching;

and Dickie's one developed gift would not have carried him through the quagmire of ill-expounded "English subjects" that were still necessary to raise him from form to form. . . .

II

Dickie's father never read his letters at the breakfast table; and when he called his wife into the sacred precincts of his study at eleven o'clock, and asked her to sit down, she knew that some serious trouble was in the air. So apprehensive was she, indeed, that she failed to grasp the infamy implied by Dr. Barnard's suggestion.

"Does that mean some kind of disgrace?" she asked anxiously.

"Impossible for him to think of a scholarship," her husband replied, avoiding explanations and conveying his sense of some impassable gulf between their ways of thought in this regard.

He never had explained certain things to her, not because there was a fundamental lack of sympathy between them, but because he was inarticulate where his reserves were concerned. He could not explain, now, why the thought of any son of his being educated on the "Modern Side" was distasteful to him. He had been a fellow of Emmanuel (resigning his Fellowship under the old University laws on his marriage), and his two elder boys had both won classical scholarships at Cambridge. That was the honoured tradition that Dickie was about to break in an untraditional way. There were other ways of breaking it, more shameful; but, inexplicably, less perturbing. They were, it is true, cause for distress but of another kind. Mr. Lynneker's elder brother who held the family living at Culver had four sons, only two of whom had gone to the University, but the other two could be accounted for as precociously sowing their wild oats. Dickie's failure was more plebeian. In Mr. Lynneker's thought the idea of the

"Modern Side" was associated with trade; and Dickie's maternal grandfather had been a tea-merchant.

He shirked that issue and went on: "It's quite out of the question to send him to Cambridge unless he gets a scholarship. I don't know where the money's coming from for Barnard's fees next term."

Mrs. Lynneker's face slipped automatically into the particular expression of distress that it always wore when this perpetual, heart-breaking question of money was under discussion. Her eyebrows drew together and her mouth tightened. For fifteen years she had met her husband's complaints about expenditure with a pained silence and that expression of helpless distress.

"I'm overdrawn nearly three hundred pounds at the Bank, now," Mr. Lynneker continued almost by force of habit, "and I suppose I must sell more shares. I don't know how much longer this sort of thing can go on. Edward's costing me more than a hundred a year at Emmanuel, and if he stays on at home while I give him a title for orders. . . ." He fidgeted with his neat grey beard and then added: "And Latimer will be going up to Downing in October. His scholarship is only £35, and he will be on my hands for at least three years."

Neither husband nor wife had looked at one another since the topic of money had been opened. There had been a steady misunderstanding between them on that question ever since the expenses of their family had begun to overtake their income. His unexpressed complaint was that she "could not understand the value of money"; hers that he exaggerated his difficulties. And neither of them had ever put their grievance into words in each other's presence. The children knew both sides, and Eleanor, the eldest of the family, was furtively trying to reduce expenses, while Edward was inclined to agree with his mother. He had good reason to hope that she was right in her estimate, for he had bills at Cambridge that he could never hope to pay out of his allowance. The other three, and more particularly Adela, took the line that it was "bound to be all

right." Mrs. Lynneker, after a decent interval of pained forbearance, gently slipped away from the awful topic by saying,

"I don't quite understand what it is that Dickie has *done* . . . ?" She halted on the last word and gave it the value of an interrogation.

Her husband frowned. "He hasn't done—anything," he said with evident annoyance. "The truth of the matter is that he will have to go into the Bank. I must speak to Bell about it when I go in to Medborough."

"Will he like that?" asked Mrs. Lynneker, thinking not of the bank-manager, but of Dickie.

"Entirely his own fault," Mr. Lynneker said. He spoke impatiently to cover any hint of a threatened injustice. He was not consciously aware that he was making the most of his son's failure in order to find an excuse for avoiding expense, but he was fretted by a conflict of motives. He disliked that sense of conflict, and he wanted immediately to be relieved from it. "Entirely his own fault," he repeated. "He has had every opportunity. If he had done as well as Edward and Latimer, I should have sold another of the bank shares to send him to Cambridge. But if Barnard suggests putting him on the Modern Side at sixteen, it's a hopeless case."

"Poor Dickie," sighed Mrs. Lynneker.

"I shall keep him at Oakstone for another year," Mr. Lynneker concluded; a splendid compromise that gave him ease from the harry of that sub-conscious conflict. "He shall have another year," he elaborated, "and he must make the best of his opportunities. If he doesn't do better . . ."

"Shall you tell him?" Mrs. Lynneker asked.

"I think we might warn him that it will be inevitable for him to go into the Bank unless he can get a scholarship. I shall write to Barnard. In any case it will be quite useless to put him on the Modern Side."

Even if Dickie was doomed to work in a Bank at Medborough, he should have the opportunities afforded by a sound classical education.

III

Dr. Barnard took a humorous view of Dickie's case. His doctor's degree was in Letters, not in Divinity, and if he had not found it advisable for the sake of his family to accept the headmastership of Oakstone, he would probably have developed into a slightly whimsical historian.

To him, the school was an amusing experience; he had never thought of trying to understand the boys; and his treatment of Dickie in the present instance was amiably characteristic.

He asked him to breakfast, and afterwards gave him a quarter of an hour before first school.

"I've had a letter from your father, Lynneker," he began.

"Does he want me to go on the Modern Side, sir?" Dickie asked anxiously. To him, also, the suggestion had conveyed a hint of disgrace; unless you were cramming for Woolwich or Sandhurst, you were curiously out of it on the Modern Side; you became associated with the thirty or forty day-boys from the town, who definitely ranked as members of a lower social grade.

Dr. Barnard made one of his amusing grimaces. He was clean-shaved, and had a mobile, expressive mouth.

"No, for some esoteric reason, that he hasn't made quite clear to me, he doesn't," Barnard said. "But I gather that he is prepared to give you another chance. Another year, he says, but presumably that means four terms from now."

Dickie was thinking that with two more summer terms before him, he ought certainly to get his first eleven cap before he left. If he could do that, he wouldn't mind so much.

"Oh! good, sir," he mumbled.

"Is it so good?" asked Barnard caustically. "If you are going to stick in the middle of the Remove, Lynneker, we really haven't much use for you, here, you know. If you're going into training for the business of a mollusc, better go and practise by yourself on some lonely rock."

Dickie looked miserable. "I do try, sir," he said.

"To be a limpet?"

"No, sir, to get out of the Remove."

"You will have to try harder," returned Barnard with a whimsical smile; "and go on trying. Now, cut along, or you'll be late for call-over."

He felt that he had done all that was possible for Lynneker II, but by way of taking special precautions,—Dickie was in his own house and represented a capitation fee—he said a few words to Latimer after the Lower Sixth was dismissed that morning.

"You might see if you can't help your young brother with his classical work, Lynneker," was the form in which this further display of interest was manifested. "Have him up to your study sometimes during preparation. Your father seems anxious about him."

Latimer was not sorry to have opportunity for rubbing in his authority. As a prefect he was able to enforce due respect from Dickie during term; but in the holidays the effort to maintain his dignity had been altogether too irksome since that declaration of independence in the Rectory dining-room.

"Here, you're to come up to my study for prep.," he announced to Dickie that evening after tea. "Barnard says you're a rotten little shirker, and I've got to keep an eye on you."

Dickie looked sulky. He had no faith in Latimer's ability to elucidate the structural difficulties of the Latin tongue. Wickford was more patient than Latimer, and Wickford was very difficult to follow; he took so much for granted.

Dickie had taught himself mathematics. He had discovered at the age of nine that the "proof" of subtraction by adding subtrahend and difference explained the mysterious business of "borrowing." He found that discovery immensely satisfying; and when he was tired of it began to seek other arithmetical satisfactions. He found so many and took so much delight in them that when he came to algebra, it presented few difficulties. Here, again, the

"laws" that were dogmatically laid down with no reason given, were open to investigation; and repaid the enquirer by demonstrating that they were not to be counted among the didactic inventions of some prehistoric governess, but were natural and inevitable consequences of certain primary and highly credible assumptions. Algebra, in fact, worked; and was as fascinating as any other puzzle that could be engagingly and neatly solved.

Latin had offered no such key to his understanding. He never thought of it as having once been the spoken language of a people. He had learnt it by rote; case, tense and syntax; and no one had ever suggested a single etymological analogy that might have related Latin to his own English speech. Also, he had made no enquiry into the historical authenticity of Gaius Julius Cæsar's account of his Gallic campaigns. Dickie, and the overwhelming majority of his schoolfellows, considered "Cæsar," in so far as they had considered the thing at all, as a schoolbook written by some long-forgotten pedagogue who had composed it as an exercise in composition, and introduced all the tricks and catches of the characteristic examination paper.

At Oakstone in the year 1891, no master thought it necessary to enter into a reasonable account of Cæsar's strenuous life at home and abroad. No humanising parallels were suggested, such as that between the crossing of the Rhine in 58 B. C. and the march by Besançon and Belfort to Alsace; and the invasion of the same country by another Cæsar only five years before Dickie was born. Besançon remained steadily as Vesentio, some stupidly romantic place that had no position in the map of modern Europe; just as the Helvetii had but the vaguest connexion in Dickie's mind with the inhabitants of Switzerland. When modern names occurred, such as the Alps or the Rhone, they were dismissed as having been inserted by the long-forgotten pedagogue, for the sake of verisimilitude. Roman history was not taught at Oakstone with any reference to geography, much less with reference to its influence on the

present condition of the stultified boys who wrestled with Cæsar as with an exponent of syntax, learning Latin grammar from history, and entirely ignorant of the fact that they might have learnt more history from a study of their own tongue. But "English subjects" had, also, been formalised into a meaningless dogma at Oakstone; a school that was fully representative of its class at that period of educational development.

And Latimer, true exponent that he was of the method that had produced him, was quite unable to provide any stimulus that should set his younger brother to the investigation of new and fascinating puzzles,—puzzles that had a solution no less than those of algebra. Poor Dickie, bungling subject and object under the disguises of nominative and accusative; and trying to render every phrase by some absolute English equivalent, as if Cæsar had been first translated into Latin and it was essential to rediscover the precise terms of the English original; poor obfuscated Dickie was forced to submit with the patience of a circus horse to Latimer's dogmatic and arbitrary expoundings of his author.

"Great Scott, haven't you learnt yet that '*do*' governs the dative?" was Latimer's method of instruction copied from the methods of his own preceptors; and he never paused, himself, to consider the meaning of the case-name, nor condescended to expound by an English analogy that you give something *to* somebody. When forced to a further elaboration by a failure of expletive, his pedantic explanation had reference to "the remoter object"; which to Dickie's thoroughly confused mind only conveyed the idea of a person standing rather further away. All those arbitrary grammatical terms had to be learnt by heart as one might learn any other jargon, merely for the sake of getting out of the Remove, and being saved in the process from the social indignity of going on the "Modern Side."

Considerable pertinacity and an efficient memory, even for meaningless formulæ, saved Dickie from immediate disgrace. He learnt the rules by sheer force of application,

a system that left him liable to make the most childish blunders. And that liability further retarded him, for Elliott, who took the lower fifth, was highly irascible, and fear of his flaming denunciations filled Dickie with a sullen opposition that had the effect of making him forget the farrago he had so patiently acquired.

The only really bright spot that compensated him for all the harassments of that summer term, was the fact that he somewhat precociously got his first-eleven colours five days before the holidays by going in seventh wicket and making 53 not out, against a particularly strong team, in the "Old Boys" match.

IV

It was Elliott who by a lucky fluke found for Dickie's obstinate stupidity, a more satisfying explanation than Wickford's "gone stale,"—a phrase that dealt only with effects.

Elliott had been in a highly inflammable condition all the morning, and Livy—edited for the use of schools, with notes—had finally been flung at Dickie's head. The book had been thrown violently in a spurt of furious temper, but had immediately opened to display a tremendous flutter of white wings, had soared upwards in an unexpected curve and dropped accurately but tamely at Dickie's feet.

He picked the book up and politely returned it. The rest of the form stiffened and watched eagerly. They had seen a boy knocked down for less.

But either Elliott's passion had been expended by its physical expression, or he had realised that a further display might make him appear ridiculously anxious to retrieve his failure. He accepted the Livy quietly; leaned forward in his chair, and stared over his desk at the apparently submissive Dickie.

"Quite Dædalian, eh, Lynneker?" he said quietly.

"Yes, sir," returned Dickie.

"The allusion is no doubt perfectly clear to you?"

Dickie considered a moment, his thought confused by some association with Pygmalion—they pronounced their Latin at Oakstone, in those days, as if it were an English dialect, with endless misunderstandings about the “length” of the vowels.

“You’ve heard of Dædalus, I presume?” Elliott continued with an increasingly ironic inflexion.

Dickie knew that he was done, now. A black screen had come between him and all his tediously memorised knowledge. It had been temporarily obliterated and no fierce concentration of effort, mental or physical—he did, indeed, resort at times to the drastic measure of beating his head with his fists—would raise the horrid curtain that was interposed between him and his little docket of facts. Presently, perhaps when he had his head down in the “scrum,” a wonderful illumination would come to him. The screen would fade and he would be able to recall rules of syntax, irregular verbs, classical allusions, and even fragments of the text of Livy or Cicero, with a delightful ease and clearness.

“Yes, sir, I’ve heard of him; lots of times, I suppose,” he said valiantly, and he lifted his head and looked at his form-master with an expression of tired patience. “But when I’m asked suddenly, my mind simply goes blank. I expect I’m some kind of idiot, sir, really.”

“Oh! you’re several kinds of idiot, Lynneker,” Elliott returned, “and unhappily the most obvious kind is particularly exasperating. Come, now, doesn’t the name of Dædalus convey any sort of suggestion to your mind? Taken in conjunction with the recent flight of Livy?”

Dickie was patently trying hard; so patently that Elliott was interested.

“I suppose you’ve never taken any interest in these fables?” he asked.

“I’m afraid I haven’t, sir.”

“Don’t you want to know them?”

“I’m afraid I don’t, sir.”

“Why not, Lynneker?”

"It all seems rather useless sort of tosh, sir!" Dickie said.

Elliott, in an uncharacteristic mood of placidity, found himself facing a question that was too difficult for him; and to give himself a little time turned to the brilliant Hudson, who was at the head of the lower fifth, that Christmas term.

"Can you tell us anything about Dædalus, Hudson?" he asked.

Hudson was facile. When he had briefly detailed the story of the flight into Sicily and the death of Icarus, he was prepared to enter into what was evidently to him the more interesting question of Dædalus's claim to fame as an architect and sculptor, more particularly with reference to a mention of him in the Iliad.

Elliott interrupted him. "Thank you, Hudson," he said. "We'll have your lecture some other time. But I should just like to ask you, now, whether all this seems rather useless sort of tosh to you?"

"No, sir." Hudson smiled the superior smile of the well-informed.

"And how would you define your use for it?" Elliott continued.

"Well, it's knowledge, sir," replied Hudson.

"And your use for knowledge is what?"

Hudson began to suspect a trap. "Isn't it what we come here to learn, sir?" he returned, guardedly.

Elliott realised that that enquiry could not expediently be prosecuted further. He turned back to Dickie.

"Haven't you any desire to shine as shines the brilliant Hudson, Lynneker?" he asked.

Dickie looked over his shoulder at the paragon, sitting self-consciously elate at his desk.

"Not particularly, sir," he said; and a pleased titter from the rest of the form marked the fact that the precocious Hudson was too clever to be popular.

That titter, however, closed the episode. Elliott was reminded that his plunge into boy-psychology was become

a pleasant excuse for wasting time, and that Livy was still untranslated.

"Perhaps it may encourage your taste for classical knowledge, Lynneker," he said, "if you were to read up all you can find about Dædalus and write me an essay on him of, say, five hundred words. Try it; and bring me what you've done on Saturday morning, will you? Now, Atcherley, when you've done smiling, will you go on; page 7, line 22. . . ."

But when he was talking to Wickford that evening, Elliott found his explanation.

"The attitude of that fellow Lynneker, you know, rather intrigues me," he said. "He isn't interested in classics simply because he doesn't get anything out of them. And he doesn't seem to care a damn for knowledge for its own sake. It's no satisfaction to Lynneker just to know. Now that little prig, Hudson, preens himself all over with the mere pride of being an authority."

"Hudson ought to do something for the school," Wickford replied, effectually quenching Elliott's enthusiasm. "Get a senior scholarship, or something. Barnard was saying, the other day . . ."

And unfortunately for Dickie, Elliott made no further application of his one bright discovery.

The essay on Dædalus was delivered punctually on Saturday morning. When it was a matter of mere application, Dickie was never at fault.

V

And despite his marked tendency to blunder and all his apparent stupidities, he had succeeded in crawling up to the third place in his form order by the end of his next summer term. The examinations helped him wonderfully. Sitting at a desk, with boys from the lower school on either side of him—an arrangement that effectually anticipated any chance of copying—and with a printed set of

questions to answer, Dickie was at his best. That horrible screen never fell on those occasions. The Cambridge examiner reported that his Latin and Greek prose and verse were uninspired by any feeling for the language, but that he was sound, very sound; and followed that opinion by one of surprise that a boy of Lynneker's age (he was seventeen then) and capacity should be still in so low a form; the lowest form, indeed, that the Cambridge don had to examine.

Elliott curled his handsome moustache and scowled a little when that report was handed on to him. He was inclined to believe, now, that Lynneker had in some inexplicable way been shirking for the past two years. If he could do so well in examinations, he could have done better in class, was Elliott's argument; and Dickie was arbitrarily included thereafter in the category of boys who "wouldn't try."

Nevertheless, Dickie was the success of Speech Day that year. He had only won the despised mathematical prize, and when Lord Bingley (very weary and bored, but his wife was in bed with "Russian" influenza) automatically handed over the solid, leather-bound, gold-stamped edition of "The Wealth of Nations," with his appropriate, but quite inaudible mumble, some of the visitors were quite unable to account for the unprecedented howl of ovation that greeted the stumbling Dickie.

It was the etiquette at Oakstone for the school to make no sound during the announcement of the prize-winners' names, nor during the candidate's trying ascent of the platform steps. Until the orthodox mumble (Lady Bingley whispered) was done and the prize actually delivered, the school remained patiently silent, and after the first two or three occasions, ignorant visitors learnt to restrain their nervous, perfunctory clapping until the right moment.

And it was just that class of visitors who were startled into asking what that square-looking boy with the handsome hair had done, when, as Dickie received his Adam Smith, a sudden roar shook the big school-room and sent

the hands of mothers, aunts and sisters to their shocked ears; while their faces were contorted by the deprecating smiles that marked their compromise between physical agony and a sense of the occasion. That class of visitors had not heard that Dickie had made 117 not out in the first innings of the "Old Boys' " Match yesterday afternoon; and many of them would have failed to appreciate the achievement as an excuse for so outrageous a clamour. . . .

Mr. Lynneker, sitting with his stick between his knees and his black wide-awake hung on the ivory handle, banged away furiously and made no attempt to conceal the tears in his eyes. He was momentarily oblivious of the five members of his family clustered about him. His one black sheep was miraculously changed into an ewe lamb, the youngest and just then, as it seemed, the most precious of his flock. But he concealed his emotion as an University man should in the presence of his grown sons, when Dickie came and modestly plumped his heavy brown book into his mother's lap.

Mr. Lynneker's "dear boy" was a sotto-voce comment, only heard by his wife who, with Adela, was examining the prize itself, as if the real glory lay in this substantial recognition; with its engraved plate of the school-arms, inside the cover, slightly disfigured by Dr. Barnard's too scholarly handwriting.

Edward in his all-round collar, and wearing the air of a most aristocratic and elegant deacon, smoothed his neat dark moustache, and preserved his dignity by a smile of approving condescension. But Latimer, not quite above the suspicion of failure as an undergraduate of the slightly contemptible Downing, came out with a "good for you, young Dickie," and then fearing that he had, if anything, overdone it, went on: "We all prayed that you wouldn't stumble up the steps, and lump down on old Bingley."

Every one of the six was more self-conscious than the recipient of honour himself. His blushing had been done before he reached this eddy of family life.

"The shouting wasn't for this bally thing," he explained.

"It was for my century yesterday. There's young Hudson going up again; supposed to be the most brilliant chap the school's ever turned out. He's only sixteen, now, and head of the upper fifth this term. Well, all I mean is that they don't shout for him much, although he's supposed to be a credit to the place. You remember him, of course, Latimer?"

"Rather," agreed Latimer, glad to engage in any topic other than Dickie's success. "Bright little kid in Wickford's house."

"I believe he came the term after I left," put in Edward, leaning forward.

"He's come on tremendously the last year," explained Dickie. "But he's a bit too cocky to be popular. Puts on a lot of smug side, you know, as if he knew everything and the answer to it. He's pretty good, though. Old Barnyard's fearfully keen on him. They're trying to coach him for a senior school at Trinity."

VI

The contemplation of young Hudson's brilliant abilities was not permitted to damp Mr. Lynneker's emotional pleasure in his son's success. The sunlight that streamed in solid prisms of golden dust through the high, narrow window of the big school-room, was shining that day for the honour and glory of the new generation of Lynneker. And when Dickie's head, and particularly the strong curves of his unmanageable hair, was thrown into massive relief by the moving slant of that all too palpable beam, his father had a wonderful sense that it was this youngest child of his who was to reveal the ultimate meaning of a life that must in some ways be counted a failure. Since he had married and left the Cathedral to accept the living of Halton—with £800 a year, then, but now depreciated to a doubtful £650—Mr. Lynneker had dropped out of the list of those marked for possible preferment.

But this was one of the high emotional days when his own relative failure was forgotten in his ambitions for his children. Edward and Latimer had both been good boys, but they had always been stamped with the characteristic family mediocrity. A Canon's stall was the probable limit of their ascension among church dignitaries. One of them would almost certainly get the family living of Culver. Without doubt both Edward and Latimer would be a credit to the family. . . .

The vision of Dickie that had come at that emotional moment had been of quite other achievement and Mr. Lynneker could not define it even in his own thought. This ugly duckling of his had justified himself so unexpectedly; had been so suddenly presented in the light of hero. Neither of his more scholarly brothers had ever evoked so spontaneous a burst of cheering. . . .

And on the field that afternoon, Mr. Lynneker left the women of his family under the protection of Mrs. Barnard, and wandered off to a quiet bench which was precipitately abandoned by three small boys at the threat of his approach. He sat there, a little black thoughtful figure watching the game with keen interest; a slightly old-fashioned, aristocratic little man in a clerical frock-coat, with small, neat shoes and a collar and tidy black bow that did not too definitely mark him as a parson. He rested his hands on the ivory handle of his stick, and kept his attention on the game while some remote orchestration of his thoughts charmed his imagination to pleasant rhapsodies. . . .

Dickie was to be the pride of the Lynnekers . . . a great statesman, perhaps, who would stand for all that was solid and enduring in the life of England . . . a greater premier than Salisbury; a man who would set right all that had been destroyed by that arch-villain Gladstone. . . .

That was, indeed, a wonderful afternoon; for when the Old Boys' innings was finished, Dickie in his pads and carrying his bat, came over, as if drawn by some sympathy of thought, to that lonely bench and sat down by his father's

side. Neither Edward nor Latimer would have done that. They were so much at their ease among the crowd. They had that Lynneker fascination of manner, and loved to please and be gracious to acquaintances, rather than waste their charm on their own people.

"We ought to beat them, eh?" Mr. Lynneker asked, turning a trifle desperately to the subject of the match.

"We've beaten 'em on the first innings, you know," Dickie explained. "There won't be time to play another innings apiece. The rest'll be fuddle, chiefly. I expect I shall get another smack, if Dido and Bing don't get set. We draw at half-past five."

"I wish we'd been here yesterday to see our boy batting," Mr. Lynneker commented.

"Rather! Yes, I wish you had. It wasn't a bad innings," returned Dickie and added, "I say, pater, why are you sitting out here all alone?"

"To watch the match," his father said. "The Barnards distracted one's attention." And then he rested one grey-gloved hand on Dickie's arm and went on. "I think we shall have to stay on for another year, eh? and see what we can do about a scholarship?"

"Oh! good!" murmured Dickie. "Will it be all right, pater? I mean not too big an expense? I believe, you know, it might be possible for me to get a mathematical scholarship. I'd have a good try, anyway. It's at classics that I'm such an awful duffer. I needn't actually go on the Modern Side, you know. Just do some special coaching with Armstrong."

"I think it might be managed," Mr. Lynneker said quietly; and then Bing unexpectedly spooned a "sitter" to point.

"It's awfully good of you, pater," Dickie said, getting to his feet. He paused a moment and swung his bat reflectively. "I do know I'm being a beastly expense, but I've tried jolly hard."

Mr. Lynneker's eyes were brimming again.

"Dear boy, your mother and I have been so proud of

you," he said, looking out steadily at the blurred elms on the far side of the field

"It's awfully ripping of you to let me stay on," was all Dickie could find to say. "I must go," he added. "I'll come back here when I'm out."

But he had no further opportunity for expressing all that he knew he had failed to convey, for he stayed in till stumps were drawn, and only time prevented him from making a school-record by doing the "double century trick." The bowlers were sympathetically "tossing them up" for the last quarter of an hour in order to give him the opportunity; and they would have played on for another ten minutes if the arbitrary arrangements of the railway company had not enforced the absence of half the field.

VII

Mr. Lynneker's day ended rather drearily after all that emotion.

He made his announcement concerning his changed plans for Dickie in the train going home. He had been so wrapt in his dreams that he had forgotten his family might not have been equally affected.

"Oh! father! can you afford it?" Eleanor asked. "It will be a great expense with Edward at home and Latimer at Cambridge."

"I expect I *could* get a curacy, now," put in Edward, generously, from his corner. "One of the curates at St. Peter's is only in deacon's orders."

"Quite unnecessary," Mr. Lynneker said, and looking at his wife, he understood that he had confirmed her yet again in her unspoken opinion that he exaggerated his money difficulties.

And that brought a chill which effectually froze his dreams. He was face to face once more with that terrible problem of ways and means. He had been too generous that afternoon, and his wife's look of slightly

stubborn resignation was a reminder that he had been undiplomatic in the statement of his intentions.

It was a saddening reflection that this perpetual misunderstanding with regard to money should have interfered with the joy they should have shared in their boy's success.

But the days when they could share any emotion whatever seemed hopelessly past.

"I'm very glad for Dickie's sake," Mrs. Lynneker said.

"If you really think you can afford it," repeated Eleanor anxiously.

"Didn't the little boy look a duck?" was Adela's only contribution to the conversation.

III

LAISSEZ FAIRE

I

THE village of Halton lies among the agricultural placidities of the Nene Valley. The church, splendidly dominant, stands on the upper slope of the hill that mounts gently through the unenclosed lands to the north and dies into the level of the Common. Up there the earth is open to broad horizons, and the Common is only separated from the edge of the Fens by a deep belt of wood known as the Hanglands.

The village turns its back upon those open spaces, and the last of the sporadic cottages that dares the bleak winds on that side, is half a mile from the crest of the slope. The site of Halton was chosen by Romans who knew their business, and the marks of their occupation remain to this day. On the hill massive chunks of masonry,—built of flat stone laid in “herring-bone” courses and set in cement that is hard as the stone itself,—appear as uneven masses of rock in the high retaining wall of the Rectory garden. According to Mr. Lynneker those relics marked the ruins of the Praetor’s house; for Halton had been an administrative centre in the second century.

And doubtless there had been good material for foundations in what was later the church-yard (every grave dug in a certain area yielded coins or fragments of tessellated pavement), such material as had decided the converted daughter of one of the Mercian Kings to plant her convent on that commanding spot. Her building had been comparatively evanescent, and hardly a trace remained of the

Saxons who had followed her. But when the Normans took up their claim to the right of supersession, they had built to leave a permanent monument; and the square tower of Halton church—capped three centuries later by a parapet and a spire—was a landmark that could be seen for miles down the river valley.

That big, cruciform church, spreading broad wings of nave and chancel on either side of its central tower, was warden of the whole parish. The stranger who drove out from Medborough got his first distant signal of the village by the sight of the tower and spire rising behind the big elms in the Rectory garden. He became aware, then, of a vigilant sentry, typified, a little profanely perhaps, by the full-breasted cock of the wind-vane, a bird that still seemed to boast too proudly of the part it had played in the tragedy of St. Peter.

But that distant view was obliterated when the stranger had come down the sharp hill into the main street, and could look up at the whole white mass of the guardian structure, wide-armed, secure and immensely confident. It had not the beauty of much of the Nene Valley architecture, nor was it a fine example of any style (although its Norman work was splendidly characteristic), but it gained by its differences. It was so unlike the typical village church in its broad-browed decision. No crockets fretted the outline of its spire, and the pinnacles that had plainly been designed for the corners of the tower had never been built; the majority of the buttresses on the south side had a very flat projection, and almost the only enrichments of surface—the billets, nail-heads and scales of the Norman work—were so shallow that they were invisible from the main street. Yet it defied the æsthetic criticism of the archæologist by its plain strength. It wore the air of a clean-shaven prelate, dressed in a white cassock.

The Rectory standing in its three-acre garden was only a fief of that solemn, resolute church.

Dickie had grown up in its company and accepted its watch over the Rectory garden as one of the commonplaces

of life. On week-days its uses for him were to tell the time and the direction of the wind; and its vane lifted 120 feet into the air was fairly accurate, if its clock was occasionally liable to error, an apparent frailty that was due to the eccentricities of Gann, the sexton and Rector's church-warden. Indeed, the church's only interference with the normal holiday life of the young Lynnekers was due to the untimely ringing of the bells when the ringers unexpectedly bethought themselves "to practise." There were six magnificent bells hung in that solid tower, and however delightful the sound of them at Allerton, a mile and a half away across the river, they were relentlessly overpowering in their crashing attack upon such near neighbours as the Lynnekers.

On winter evenings, with the ground floor shutters fastened and the curtains drawn, the din was reasonably softened; but Mrs. Lynneker hated the bells even then. She had an emotional objection to the sound of the peal; she found them "saddening," and hers was a temperament that never sought sadness. Her two elder sons shared her sentimental dislike to what Latimer called that "infernal practising for Christmas"; and it was characteristic of the family that until Adela made the point good, none of them had understood that the ringers "practised" out of sheer exuberance of spirit during any dark evenings. Even after Adela had demonstrated her argument by abundant instance, Mrs. Lynneker would exclaim, "Oh! surely they're not going to practise for Christmas!" when the solitary tolling of the tenor bell on some still February night proclaimed the arrival of an impatient first-comer in the belfry, calling to the attention of his fellow-ringers.

Adela followed her father in her professed liking for the bells. She, too, had dreams and reserves unguessed by the rest of the family.

To Dickie, they were just "bells," during his adolescence. He had climbed all over the cradle staging before he was ten, and had hung manfully on to the "lamb's tail" of the rope and been carried off his feet in his first attempts to

join the ringers. He had not, however, tried to decipher the old inscriptions, because they were in Latin and too painfully reminiscent of Wickford and the Remove.

II

But all the irk of that perpetual grind to memorise Latin syntax, was taken from him in the summer holidays following the speech-day ovation.

Latimer guessed that something was "up" at breakfast. He had been late for prayers, it is true, but that alone was not enough to account for his father's irritability and his mother's expression of patient suffering. Edward and Adela were staying at Culver with their uncle, and lacking any other confidant, Latimer suggested to Dickie that he should come out into the garden as soon as their father had gathered up his unopened letters and retired to the secrecy of his study.

It was a wonderful morning in early September. The dew still lay on the grass like hoar frost, and the yew hedge, the privet, the standard roses and every other available site was enriched with wheels of web that might have been spun of delicate white wool. There was not a breath of wind, but the air was riotous with sound, with the clamour of rooks, the twitter of innumerable small birds, the clatter of a reaper in the cornfield that adjoined the garden, and the distant tinkle of the blacksmith's shop down the village came in now and again as a recognisable obligato to the prominent symphony.

"Going to be jolly hot," remarked Dickie, sniffing the sharp, cold scents of the morning.

"Rather. We ought to do something," replied Latimer. He had lighted his pipe and was savouring the aroma of his tobacco. "Pity to waste a day like this mucking about the garden," he added.

"Might go fishing," suggested Dickie, and watched the little puffs of Latimer's smoke mounting compactly in neat

lavender clouds and wreaths. "Blow some on the rose bushes," he continued. "The green fly's perfectly wicked this year."

Latimer made a few experiments in fumigation and then desisted on the ground that it spoilt the enjoyment of his pipe, the after-breakfast pipe, the best smoke of the day. "I'll come," he said, taking up the interrupted conversation. "We'll go down to the backwater behind Allerton lock. We might take sandwiches, or something, for lunch."

"Good," was Dickie's comment. He was walking along the edge of the back lawn, kicking up tiny fountains of spray from the grass, and leaving the marks of his passage in dark trails along the whiteness of the dew-drenched grass. Latimer, in his pumps, kept sedately to the gravel path.

"I say, did you notice anything funny at breakfast?" he said, coming to the point that had been intriguing him.

"Yes." Dickie evidently had no doubts on the subject. "I wondered if it was because you didn't come down to prayers. You miss 'em about two days in every three, now."

Latimer hesitated and decided not to question that charge. "I don't think it was," he said.

"The pater asked whether you weren't coming, after the servants were in the room."

"Did he?" Latimer's tone expressed resentment at having been thus inferentially criticised not only before Dickie, but also in the presence of the two maid-servants. He was annoyed with his father for displaying so little tact; why couldn't he have waited and spoken to Latimer, himself, quietly. He always meant to be down to prayers, but he had an unfortunate habit of going to sleep again after he was called. Emma always called him too early. . . .

"I'll speak to him about it," he said by way of vindicating his independence, and then went on quickly: "But it wasn't that that made the mater look so worried."

"Do you think it's the old money trouble again?" Dickie asked.

"I don't know. Yes, I do. I expect it is. There was a letter from the Bank. I saw it on the table."

"Do you think it's serious?"

"How should I know?"

"They'd never put him in the Bankruptcy Court, or anything of that sort, would they?"

Latimer, in the capacity of man of the world, with the vast experiences of an undergraduate going up next month to begin his second year, paused to give that question judicial consideration.

"Who's 'they,' after all, you know," he said. "I don't suppose we owe much money to tradesmen and people of that kind."

"What about that overdraft at the Bank?"

"They can't come down on him for that," replied Latimer with an air of authority. "It's their own look-out for letting him overdraw."

"But it means selling more shares or something," commented Dickie.

"Makes one feel rather rotten, doesn't it?" remarked Latimer. "I can't think why Edward doesn't get a proper curacy."

"You'll have to stay on at Downing anyhow, I suppose?"

"Well, of course, you young ass. How the dickens am I going to make a living if I don't take my degree? But I expect you'll have to leave Oakstone."

"Yes," replied Dickie. "I know." He paused a moment and then said: "I'd better go and get some worms. Will you ask the mater about something to take for lunch? The tackle's all ready. I used it a few days ago."

"All serene," replied Latimer calmly. "I'll go in a minute or two. I expect the mater's still in the kitchen."

"She isn't; she's here," remarked Dickie, as he turned to go down the lawn.

Mrs. Lynneker in an abundant blue apron and snow overshoes was coming through the wire arch that separated

the back from the front garden on that side. She stopped to grab a fine head of cow-parsley as she passed the corner of the shrubbery.

"Going to feed the rabbits," Latimer commented.

"No, I think she's looking for us," Dickie said, and the two boys came out from under the screen of the big elm at the top of the lawn and hailed her.

She looked up quickly and made signs to them, and then came towards them at a little eager trot.

"I wish she wouldn't *run*," murmured Latimer, frowning. Dickie saved her the exertion by hurrying to meet her.

III

Mrs. Lynneker had stopped before he reached her. She still looked harassed.

"I've been trying to find you," she said.

"Me, more particularly?" asked Dickie, as Latimer sauntered up.

Mrs. Lynneker looked from one to the other of her two sons with an expression of faint distress.

"Your father has been dreadfully upset this morning," she said.

"Bank?" queried Latimer briefly, and his mother nodded and set her lips.

"I don't know how serious it is, really," she said. She had already taken the two boys into her confidence, and the three of them stood intent and frowning, weighing and re-considering the old problem.

"He says that he can't overdraw any more," Mrs. Lynneker continued, "and that he'll have to sell more shares. He asked me to tell you. He said that you ought to know just how things are."

"What does he expect us to do?" asked Latimer impatiently. "I suppose I could get some rotten mastership or other," he added as an afterthought.

"I might emigrate," remarked Dickie, and looked at his

mother hopefully as though the suggestion were full of promise.

"If one only knew *how* serious it was," she said, returning to her old grievance. "Your father never tells me anything."

"It's rot to talk about emigrating," was Latimer's comment.

"I suppose *something* ought to be done," Dickie returned. "I didn't suggest that you should go."

"We ought to be told the actual facts," Latimer protested. He paused for a moment on the thought of declaring that he would go at once and demand full confidence from his father, and then said: "One doesn't want to do anything absolutely desperate, unless there's some jolly good reason for it."

Mrs. Lynneker sighed helplessly, saw a fine dandelion at the edge of the shrubbery and made a plunge for it. When she had added that plant to the trophies already collected in her apron, she sighed again and said,

"It's happened so often before, of course."

"But he can't go on selling shares for ever, you know, mater," Dickie said. "He'll get to the end of them one day."

"I've never properly understood about those shares," his mother acknowledged.

Latimer was kicking a hole in the gravel.

"Look here, I'll go in and talk to him," Dickie announced.

His mother and brother shook their heads doubtfully.

"He won't tell you anything," Mrs. Lynneker said. "He's—he's very upset this morning."

"You'd probably be infernally cheeky or something," was Latimer's criticism.

Dickie looked moody and obstinate.

"Somebody's got to do something," he said. "What's the good of talking about it and never doing anything? If it's really serious we ought to know, and I'm quite willing to go to Canada or somewhere, and try to make a living. I ought to be able to get a job as a carpenter."

"‘Mr. Dick puts us all right,’" quoted Latimer ironically; "only you're pretty certain to make things twenty times worse, if you do go in and see the pater," he added. "Are you going to demand to see his pass-book?"

"Don't be so frightfully funny," Dickie said, pushing Latimer's opposition on one side. "I think I will go and see him, mater," he insisted.

She looked up at him with a gleam of hope. "What shall you say to him?" she asked.

"I don't know," replied Dickie. He had a sudden sense of the coming interview that made him feel as if he had been disloyal in doubting his father's difficulties. He wondered why, as a family, they should be for ever "taking sides"; why his mother was always ranged as his father's antagonist?

"Well, if you'll take my advice, you'll jolly well leave it alone, young Dickie," put in Latimer. "You'll only make some holy blunder; you always do."

Dickie looked at his brother with frank interest. "I'm not sure it isn't better to blunder a bit than just go on letting things slide," he said.

Latimer had gone back to his excavations in the gravel path. "Oh! don't be a young ass," he grumbled. "Who's letting things slide? Only one has to use a certain amount of tact—if you happen to know what tact means."

"Perhaps it would be better if Latimer went," hazarded Mrs. Lynneker.

"I suppose I ought to go if any one does," Latimer admitted.

"Well, go, then," Dickie urged him.

"I'm not sure that it's the right thing to do," he protested, frowning. "You're in such an infernal hurry about it. It seems to me that we ought to consider everything very carefully before we go in and see him."

Dickie looked at his brother, who didn't return his regard, and then at his mother, who met his eyes and framed the words "You go" with her lips. She had more faith

in Dickie's blundering than in all Latimer's or Edward's tact.

Latimer was carefully filling up and smoothing down the hole he had made in the path. "I can't see that it's any good rushing it, in any case," he said. "Let's go fishing and talk it all over. We thought of going to Allerton," he explained to his mother. "Could we take some sandwiches or something?"

"I must go and dig for worms," put in Dickie, and turned to go across the lawn towards the kitchen garden, and more especially towards the cucumber frames, the habitat of the brandlings he sought. From behind Latimer's back he nodded reassuringly to his mother.

Before he had crossed the lawn, she had returned to her forage for green stuff. Latimer was thoughtfully pacing the gravel walk.

IV

Dickie entered the house through the kitchen, went straight to his father's study and knocked gently. No one ever entered the study without knocking.

His father looked up with evident irritation when Dickie answered the summons to come in.

"I say, pater, can I speak to you for a minute?" he asked.

The frown of irritation was not smoothed from Mr. Lynneker's face by that unexpected request. He associated all such tentative openings with some kind of demand for money; and he imagined, now, that his message to the boys had not yet been delivered by his wife, and that Dickie's presence was due to a most unfortunately timed desire for extra pocket-money—a few shillings, perhaps, to buy a cricket-ball or fishing tackle.

"Yes, yes, what is it?" he said impatiently.

Dickie closed the door gently, and stood leaning with his back against it.

"I want to help, pater, if I can," he said. Edward and

Latimer would have looked a little sheepish and self-conscious if they had made that offer; Dickie looked straight into his father's face, with a frank sympathy.

"Help?" echoed Mr. Lynneker. The irritation had gone from his voice and he was fidgeting with the quill pen he had been cutting when Dickie came in.

"Yes," Dickie said. "Mater's been telling me and Latimer that things are a bit rocky all round; and I want you to let me leave Oakstone and go to Canada, or somewhere. Will you?"

Mr. Lynneker dropped his pen, got up and stood by the mantelpiece, turning his back on the room. He was wondering why none of his family had ever treated him like this before. Even Eleanor was never perfectly frank and open with him. And he had a feeling of resentment against his wife. She was in their children's confidence. They told her everything and she had always stood between them and him. He had got into the habit of sending them messages by her. . . .

"I shouldn't mind a bit, you know, except, of course, for leaving you and the mater," Dickie went on as his father still kept silence.

"But, my dear boy, why Canada?" Mr. Lynneker asked, without turning his head. He had one foot on the fender and was apparently studying the empty grate.

"I don't know," returned Dickie. "I thought it was the kind of place one did go to, that was all. I thought I might p'raps work as a carpenter."

"Bell might take you into my Bank . . ." Mr. Lynneker began and Dickie caught at the suggestion before it could be elaborated.

"Oh! I say, would he, do you think? That's a good idea," he exclaimed. "Couldn't we see about it at once?"

Mr. Lynneker had a momentary suspicion of his son's motives, and he turned round and faced him as he said,

"Are you so anxious to leave school?"

"Well—rather not," returned Dickie, suddenly quenched, a little affronted. "You know I'm not, pater," he went on.

"I'm awfully keen on Oakstone; but the mater told us you were in some kind of money trouble, and Latimer and I want to help."

"Latimer, too?"

"He said something about a mastership," Dickie explained and wondered whether Latimer would thank him for mentioning that impulsive offer. "Of course, he's got his scholarship," he added; "and it would be rather a pity for him to chuck it."

Mr. Lynneker sat down and took up his pen again. He had been moved by Dickie's offer, but he wanted before all things to be perfectly just.

"Have you ever thought of taking orders, Dick?" he asked.

Dickie's cheeks flushed. He had been expecting this suggestion from one or other of his parents, and anticipated the possibility of what he called "ructions" when he made his inclinations known. He might, now, have avoided the direct issue by protesting that the expense involved put that proposal out of the question; but Dickie had none of the Lynneker gift for finesse.

"I have thought about it, pater," he said, "but I don't want to be a parson."

As a human being and the father of a family, Mr. Lynneker was relieved by his boy's statement; but as a priest of the English church, he had what he regarded as an unavoidable duty to perform. He frowned slightly and readjusted his pince-nez, as he replied; and his voice had become clearer and more formal.

"Your mother and I would have liked you to go into the church," he said; "and I fancy I could still manage it by hook or by crook. I am not at all anxious to see you tied down to a stool in a Bank, I assure you. It isn't an occupation I should choose for you."

He paused a moment, but as Dickie still blushed uncomfortably and made no reply, he went on,

"Why don't you want to take orders, my boy?"

"I'm not sure exactly," Dickie said. "I just feel that

I'd sooner not. It—it seems to me such a *tie*, somehow."

"You could hardly wish for a better tie," his father returned irritably, uncomfortably, conscious that he could appreciate his son's attitude only too well.

"Oh! I know," Dickie said. "But I don't feel that I could go in for it with any enthusiasm."

"That might come later," Mr. Lynneker suggested, rather in the manner of a worldly mother advising her daughter to marry for position.

Dickie's hand went up to his hair. This was a problem that had to be solved, and he attacked it without regard to secondary aspects.

"I don't feel that way about it," he said. "I wouldn't go into the church unless I meant to go in for it like anything. I'd want to be a missionary, or something desperate. . . ."

Mr. Lynneker's sense of humour was a little smothered that morning. The house-bills for August had been unusually, as he thought unnecessarily, high, a fact that had upset him more than the receipt of the expected notice from the Bank. And now he was conscious of being thwarted, and implicitly criticised, a consciousness that temporarily outbalanced his realisation of his son's youthful impetuosity and real desire to help.

"When you are a little older, my boy," he said impatiently, "you'll understand that there are other and harder forms of service than the heroic. We all want to do the spectacular things, as Naaman did."

Dickie felt snubbed. This was another of those absolute that he was continually blundering against, incontrovertible statements that youth must accept with all the other dogmas of the prehistoric governess.

"Yes, father," he said submissively. "I don't want to be heroic."

"Have you ever had a particular leaning to any profession?" his father asked. "Or have you simply never thought about it?"

"I think I should rather like to be an astronomer," Dickie

replied; and still his father did not smile. He shrugged his shoulders as though to dismiss such puerile fancies, and obliterated the whole of the recent conversation by saying, "I'm sure I don't know what to do for the best."

"Why not the Bank, pater?" asked Dickie, quite willing to come back to the obvious and practical.

But Mr. Lynneker had become lost, now, in a maze of cross-purposes. He was sincerely anxious about his financial position, and he had been thwarted in his attempt to be unwisely generous and send Dickie to Cambridge. He would have been glad of such a valid justification for that sacrifice as the training of Dickie for Holy Orders. Lacking that, he had to confront, and refused at that moment to confront, the suggestion that he was failing in his duty to one of his sons.

"The whole thing wants consideration," he decided. "We can't possibly settle it, just now."

Dickie understood that he was dismissed. "I'm sorry I interrupted you, pater," he said; "but you know, I feel that I ought to go into the Bank."

v

It all seemed so absurdly simple to him. There were evil and remedy conveniently near together. He had not come yet to a criticism of his family, nor even to a conscious apprehension of their methods.

In that household, difficulties were debated, but it was rare for any one to take action. The average trouble, whatever it was, righted itself in time. Something always happened, sooner or later.

Edward had caught his father's phrase, and delivered himself of the remark that the affair "wanted consideration," whenever the awful alternative of taking immediate action was remotely possible. "It's no earthly good to rush things," was the line of his argument; "one has to look at the problem from every point of view." In any matter

outside politics and religion, he had a great idea of hearing both sides.

But, at seventeen, Dickie was only vaguely aware of his family's manner of avoiding the unpleasant by a settled habit of procrastination. He regarded them all, even Latimer, with a certain respect and deference that included their opinions and manner of thought. The opinions were those that he had been trained to reverence, and represented what he supposed to be Catholic and unchanging institutions. The general habit of thought fell into much the same category. It was a characteristic so familiar that it appeared to be necessarily right. His cousins at Culver followed the same habit, and no expression that he had ever heard from any of the neighbouring clergy, or small land-owners, had presented any possible alternative to the comforting policy of *laissez-faire*.

Certainly, no countervailing heresy had been preached at Oakstone. There, also, he had been taught the foolishness of opposition to what he presumed to be the accepted and settled tendencies of the universe. He had heard of radicals; there was Gann, the sexton; and some foolish candidate had contested the Medborough election in the Liberal interest last July;—but they were, *ex hypothesi*, either uneducated and contemptible vulgarians, or fools.

Charles Bradlaugh came—*pace* Mr. Lynneker, and the family accepted his classification without question—into the second category. His vaunted “atheism” had not frightened Halton, and had not, therefore, aroused any particular fury of hate. He was pitied as a blind and arrogant mite who had deplorably dared to set up his puny strength in defiance of the omnipotent immutable. Mr. Lynneker, from his security, spoke of him with a touch of condescension. “Fool!” was the limit of his abuse for Bradlaugh.

But there was a third category, not clearly differentiated by Dickie who had never troubled to examine the particular disqualifications of Radicals and “Atheists,” a list that included criminals and other varieties of antichrist. And chief among these enemies of society at that moment, was

the man who had just accepted office for the fourth time, and was proposing (with a majority of 39) to destroy the British constitution. "Fool" was no word to apply to Mr. Gladstone at Halton. He had aroused fear and an intensity of hate. He was rascal, villain, unprincipled, the man who "owed his greatness to his country's ruin"; and since 1885, specifically and without mitigation, a Murderer. An engraving of Gordon hung in the drawing-room at Halton Rectory, and Mr. Lynneker often looked at it and extolled the martyr, with bitter reference to the consummate rascal who had sacrificed him.

All these conceptions Dickie understood to be expressions of the only right and sane attitude towards religion and politics. Halton and Oakstone had striven, without any conscious object, to grave these conceptions deeply into his young mind. He had been taught. And his preceptors had conscientiously endeavoured to mould the same image that had been the model for their own training. The detail was changed in some respects but the outline was the same.

And, now, when his life was to be affected by some practical application of the principles he had been taught, he could make no application because he knew nothing of reason in this connexion. Reasons had been explicitly denied to him when he had sought them. The creed began "I believe and you must believe also"; and creeds do not open with argument. To Dickie, the Bank was merely an obvious remedy; slightly distasteful like most remedies, but effective. He could not see the dangers of life in a town, that despite its Cathedral influence, had only returned Lord William March by a majority of 273. Dickie naturally assumed that every one in Medborough who was not a vulgarian, a fool or a criminal, thought as he had been taught to think.

Nor did Mr. Lynneker, himself, objectively face and critically consider these dangers. His shrinking from the thought of the Bank as a remedy was an inevitable reaction; and was due to his sixty-five years' submission

to a particular creed and attitude. And it increased his irritation to find that his youngest son had, apparently, so little realisation of what was due to the family pride.

VI

"One moment, my boy!" he said, as Dickie turned the handle of the study door. "I don't think you realise what you are saying. Do you understand what it will mean to you if you go into my Bank as a clerk?"

Dickie tried to analyse the proposition by an inductive process.

"I suppose it means adding up lots of figures," he said; "and counting money and all that sort of thing. I don't think I should be bad at it after a little practice."

His father frowned impatiently. "I've no doubt whatever that you'd be equal to the work," he said. "But it doesn't promise a very magnificent future."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dickie. "I see. But, pater, I don't see why I need stop in the Bank for ever. I should have a certain amount of time to go on working, at maths, for example."

That was a way of escape for Mr. Lynneker's conscience, but he hesitated to take it. He had little faith in such a heroic remedy. The Lynnekers stayed where they were put; and he judged human nature, and more particularly his own sons, by the standard that was most familiar to him.

"You probably won't have much inclination to work at night after a long day in an office," he said.

"Reading maths isn't like ordinary *work*," explained Dickie. To him "work" meant cramming uninteresting facts.

"But you need a clear head," his father returned.

"Oh! I don't know," said Dickie. He had no associations between muddle-headedness and mathematics.

Mr. Lynneker attributed their inability to understand

one another to Dickie's ignorance. He was about to repeat his formula that "the whole thing wanted consideration," when Dickie interposed with the clarifying suggestion that they might "try it for three months."

Mr. Lynneker perceptibly brightened. This was a decent evasion, sanctioned by precedent. "Well, we might try it and see," was another family phrase that expressed not a spirit of empiricism, but of procrastination. The chief anxiety in his mind at that moment was with regard to Dr. Barnard, who should have had a term's notice if Dickie were to leave Oakstone. Fortunately that old statement of his intention to keep the boy on at school for another year had never been definitely cancelled.

"Hm!" commented Mr. Lynneker and looked up at his son's eager face. "If we found that it didn't answer," he said, "you might cram for a scholarship with Hornby at Little Milton." He was so honestly anxious not to spoil Dickie's chances off-hand.

"Yes," murmured Dickie reluctantly. He knew that the Vicar of Little Milton was a classical scholar. "He isn't mathematical, of course," he added.

"You're quite bent on mathematics?" his father returned with a touch of petulance.

"Well, it's the only subject I'm any good at," Dickie expostulated. He had not grasped the principle of the desirable average in education.

"Isn't that a reason why you should read up your Greek and Latin?" his father asked.

Dickie looked round the bookshelves that lined the study as if he would find some escape from this awful persistent attack of the tedious classics. Nothing but enemies confronted him. With such possible exceptions as the collected works of Dickens, Thackeray, Walter Scott and Charles Kingsley, there was not a book there that held the least interest for him. The thought of the Medborough Bank was suddenly presented as a vision of glorious freedom from Sallust, Cicero, Herodotus or Euripides, and all those

other Mediterranean authors whom he was expected to tackle before his education was complete.

"I don't see any use in doing that," he said. "If I ever go to Cambridge I shall read for the Mathematical Tripos. I know enough classics to pass my Previous, and that's all that's wanted. But we needn't bother about that now, pater, need we? Couldn't we decide to try the Bank for three months?"

"Very well, as you seem bent on it," his father said, definitely shelving the responsibility for that time. "I am going in this afternoon and I'll speak to Bell about it."

"Would you like me to come?" Dickie asked.

Mr. Lynneker thought not. He felt that he was conferring an honour on the Medborough manager of the City & County Bank by permitting Dickie to work for him; he did not mean to submit his son for Mr. Bell's approval.

"Right-oh!" agreed Dickie; and then understanding that the conference was ended and that it was only necessary to make some final comment before he departed to dig for worms, he fell back on the family cliché. "I expect it'll be all right," he said.

When he was alone Mr. Lynneker wished that he had made some acknowledgment of his son's generosity in offering himself. Dickie was obviously ignorant of the nature of the sacrifice he was making, and all boys wanted to get away from the discipline of school life. But he had come forward with genuine sympathy, and a practical suggestion. "There are great possibilities in Dickie," Mr. Lynneker murmured; he had a confirmed habit of talking to himself in undertones—"great possibilities." He repeated the phrase three or four times. He wanted to dwell on that, and to put away from him the thought that, in some inexplicable way, Dickie was not a Lynneker.

VII

Dickie found his mother and Latimer sitting in the dining-room with the door open. They were evidently keeping

their eyes on the study and waiting to hear the upshot of the momentous interview.

Latimer beckoned and closed the dining-room door with the air of a conspirator when his brother had entered.

"Well?" he said.

"I'm going into the Bank," Dickie announced briefly. "The pater's going to see Bell this afternoon."

Latimer whistled. "Pretty rotten for you," was his comment.

"I don't see it," replied Dickie. "Sooner do that than mug Livy any day."

"What did he say?" Latimer asked.

"Lots of things. He wasn't at all keen on my doing it. I'm to try it for three months. I say, you haven't got your boots on, yet. I'll go and get those worms. And, mater, do you suppose there's any paste and a bit of old yellow cheese,—cheese-paste is rather a good bait for club."

"I'll see, dear," Mrs. Lynneker said, and then: "Your father wasn't put out at all by your going in to him?"

"I don't think so," Dickie said. "He seemed all right."

"And you really don't mind?"

"Rather not; I expect it'll be rather sport. I wonder what salary I shall get?"

"Probably you won't get anything to start with," Latimer thought.

"Not much good my going if I don't," retorted Dickie. "Do buck up and see about that cheese-paste and get your boots on," he added. "I shan't be half a shake. . . ."

The sun was high above the elms, now; and save under the shadows of the big trees, the dew had all vanished from the grass.

"Ripping day," reflected Dickie, as he trowelled vigorously in the manure that was banked up round the cucumber frames. He was deciding which pools it would be advisable to fish.

He was immensely disgusted when he returned, glowing, to the house, to find that Latimer, in his pumps, was still debating the financial situation with his mother.

"Oh! great Scott, what's the hurry?" Latimer said, but Mrs. Lynneker flushed slightly and got up quickly.

"Oh! the cheese-paste!" she said. "I'll go and see about it."

"All right, mater, I can do it, now," Dickie assured her, "while Latimer gets his boots on."

IV

THE LYNNEKER METHOD

I

MR. LYNNEKER described himself as a Member of the Old School, and he was partly awake to the fact that that school was passing. He frequently affirmed his inability to understand what the younger generation was "coming to." He had been born three years before the death of George IV, and his temper was not characteristically Victorian.

His father had been a dignified old Tory pluralist who had held three livings, one in London and two in the Midlands. Culver was the chief of these holdings, ranking as hardly less than a private estate, for with so many Lynnekers in the church, the tenure of the Rectory was as reasonably assured as that of any other property.

But the Lynneker pride of race found no boast in the possession of Culver. That was a modern, 18th century, acquisition. The departed glories of the family were represented, now, by an uninteresting ruin, the remains of Linnerdale Hall, at Linnerdale in Staffordshire.

The last tenant of that estate had died in 1741, and with him the elder branch of the Lynnekers had ceased to be feudal landlords. For five hundred years, according to fair documentary evidence, they had been established in the Staffordshire dale to which they had given a name, but little record remained now of their influence there, save the shapeless mound that marked the site of the old Hall and the prevalence of variants of the patronymic among the

county people in such diverse shapes as Lanniger and Lenners.

The Earl of Carronbridge was the descendant of a younger branch. His ancestor had been a fourth son and a renegade inasmuch as he had fought on the side of York in the Civil Wars. The title of Baron Carronbridge had been conferred on this turn-coat's heir by Edward IV and the Earldom had come for some Whig advocacy in the reign of George II. This Scotch offshoot, although noble for so many generations, was usually spoken of with some suggestion of contempt by descendants of the direct line,—the mark of cadency was exhibited by the martlet of the Carronbridge coat of arms, there had been intermarriages with other Scottish families, and the Whig tradition had unhappily survived; the present Lord Carronbridge was, in theory at least, a Gladstonian, although he rarely attended the Upper House. This slight air of deferring to the junior branch did not, however, deter the English family from acknowledging the relationship. The Carronbridges, apparently, never troubled to recognise or refute the claim to kinship, which, indeed, was clearly set out in the pages of Burke.

The elder branch had not been ennobled, although they could claim kinship with many aristocratic families by intermarriage. They had sent sons to the wars, and there was a tradition that thirteen Lynnekers were killed in the battle of Crécy; but the only famous member of the race was that Thomas Linacre (the original Norman spelling) who was court physician to Henry VIII and the tutor of Erasmus, Sir Thomas More and Queen Mary; and his connexion was unhappily somewhat obscure. It was difficult to account for the fact that he was probably born at Canterbury, unless he were the illegitimate son of some apostate Lynneker pilgrim; and even so he might have derived from the Scottish branch.

Nevertheless, if the Lynneker records showed no high achievement, they exhibited all the marks of honourable and gentle birth, and a succession that stretched back with-

out a break to the Norman invasion. (The name figures among the *servientes* in Domesday Book.)—If they had not fought their way to place and honour, they had hardly fallen below the honourable level of their old position. Through all their incompetencies ran some streak of stability, of faith in their own rank.

And the old stock was still fertile. Canon Lynneker at Culver had six children, five of them boys; and the eldest brother who died in '88—he had been a stipendiary magistrate—had left a son and two daughters. The fourth brother was the only one who had had no issue. He had married a Miss Gale—possibly the fault had been hers—and had died young, as the long-lived Lynnekers counted it. The Rector of Halton referred to him as “poor Dick”; an understood allusion to the fact that he was only fifty-five at the time of his death. He, too, had been in the church and had held a living in Hampshire. Of Mr. Lynneker's two sisters one was the wife of a Welsh County Court Judge and had four children; the other had never married. Thus the six Lynnekers of the old generation were represented by eighteen children, of whom ten were sons capable of carrying on the name and the tradition. The weak period in the direct line had been in the days of old Edward, the pluralist, whose two brothers had died of small-pox before they had reached the marriageable age, and had left him alone to perpetuate the stock.

Descent from such a family was not a subject for boast; there was no need for boasting. The name announced itself. Ignorance of so notable a pedigree proclaimed the stranger as one who knew nothing of English traditions. Particularly ill-bred was that absurd question: “Are you related to the General?” the reference being to that famous brother of Lord Carronbridge's who had won his honours in the Crimea. The correct answer was to admit cousinship and, if the hearer were sufficiently interested, to mention, not the precise degree of cousinship which was almost incalculable, but the mere fact that Carronbridge was the junior branch. The thing could be done without snobbery

by any Lynneker. They had the dignified consciousness of their breed.

And yet, despite the soundness of the link that had so finely carried the chain on into the 19th century, the Lynneker blood was running a little thin. The flavour of it remained but it lacked body, like some amazingly old port that had passed the perfect development of its maturity. The strain had been so individual that intermarriage had scarcely altered it, but while still maintaining its chief characteristics, the strain was wearing out. Intellectually the Lynnekers were dropping behind their own times. They had been Tories, every man of them, since the name had come into use at the end of the seventeenth century; and, now, their conservatism was falling into senile decay; a fact that the Rector of Halton just failed to recognise in his realisation that he belonged to the Old School.

He took his own family as the standard of English culture, and deplored not the Lynneker loss of vitality, but the growing vulgarity of the new generation.

II

The mark of his attitude was to be found in his treatment of the Bank manager. Mr. Bell was, in the Rector's phrase, "a very worthy fellow." He had been a Cathedral chorister and his subsequent success had not spoiled him. The King's School at Medborough offers a free education to all choristers, and although in the mass they were regarded as social pariahs by both boarders and day-boys, an exceptional individual, such as Bell had been, could win the recognition of being treated almost as an equal. And then Bell had been a real musician. He played the piano, violin and 'cello more than passably well, and he founded and led the celebrated Medborough quartette of men's voices that was engaged all over the county for every concert of any pretension. Finally, his manner expressed him. Some becoming air of deference remained as the result

of his chorister training, an air that suited his quiet habit and justified the adjective "gentlemanly," that described him in the Precincts. As Mrs. Hillier, the Precentor's wife, put it, "One was never afraid that Mr. Bell would take advantage. . . ." He was certainly a treasure to that Cathedral branch of the City & County.

He would, in any case, have treated the Rector of Halton with the particular respect due to one of the original shareholders. In his free bachelor days—and he had not married until he was forty—with his fellowship and his minor canonry, Mr. Lynneker had saved money, and when the City & County Banking Co. had been founded in 1860, he had subscribed for and obtained five £100 shares. In thirty years those shares had quadrupled their value by appreciation and by the issue of new stock at par to the first holders, issues that until the last fifteen years Mr. Lynneker had conscientiously taken up. But during the period of heavy outlay on his children's education, he had been forced to sell £800 of his holding, and he was now paying a higher rate of interest on his £300 overdraft than his shares were earning.

Thus, in one sense, his wife was justified in her assumption that their financial situation was not so perilous as Mr. Lynneker led her to believe. It was true that if that overdraft were made good by a further sale of stock, he would still have £900 of solid capital as a stand-by in case of emergency. But as he realised, and as he believed she never could, that "sort of thing could not go on indefinitely," and moreover he was perpetually scared by the thought of that spectre which must haunt the incumbent of any Parish with good Rectory accommodation and a glebe farm of 300 acres, the fearful spectre of "ecclesiastical dilapidations," as administered under the Act of 1871.

There were times when Mr. Lynneker had daunting visions of a widow and two daughters left in very straightened circumstances. . . .

He discussed the advisability of another sale of stock

that afternoon before he opened the question of Dickie's candidature. Indeed, he had got to his feet and was drawing on his driving-gloves, and Bell was politely standing, with that look of intent occupation on his face, which always saved him from the necessity of offering superfluous comments on the weather.

"Ah! by the way," Mr. Lynneker began, "I think I remember your saying, Bell, that you might have a vacancy in the Bank for my youngest boy?"

"I have not yet filled it, Mr. Lynneker," Bell replied gravely.

"And do you think—er—what would you advise? I feel that I can't afford to send a third son to Cambridge."

"The Bank does not offer any considerable advancement," Bell said reflectively, as if he were considering some hypothetical case. "A junior clerkship begins at sixty pounds a year and rises by yearly increments of ten pounds to a hundred and fifty. After that there is the possibility of a branch managership, but the vacancies do not occur very often."

"He might perhaps try it for a few months," ventured Mr. Lynneker.

"Yes?" Mr. Bell's agreement was obviously tempered by a reservation that he immediately displayed. "Yes, but it would hardly be advisable to put that before the Directors. They leave the engagement of clerks to me, but I report, of course; and I am particularly instructed to find young men who are likely to remain with us. In a Bank, as you will understand, Mr. Lynneker, there are many reasons why a constant change of staff is inadvisable."

The Rector coughed irritably. "Do you make any kind of stipulation?" he asked.

"If it were possible for there to be some understanding that he would stay for five years . . ."

"He has a mathematical bias," Mr. Lynneker announced, as if Bell's suggestion had not reached him. "He talks of reading for some other profession in his spare time.

Personally I should like to see him in the church. I believe he has quite unusual abilities. We have only thought of his coming here as a stop-gap."

Mr. Bell nodded sympathetically, and looked as if he were employed in some immense mental calculation. He could maintain an unembarrassed silence for some minutes with that expression. His "I perfectly understand your position" was a particular compliment to an original shareholder who had once figured gloriously remote in the minor Canons' stalls.

"He might consent to stay for three years," Mr. Lynneker hazarded. "That would still make it possible for him to go up to Cambridge at twenty, if opportunity offered."

"May I write to you, Mr. Lynneker?" Bell asked.

"Certainly; by all means," the Rector returned, snatching at the chance of postponing decision. He could talk it over with his wife and Dickie, he thought. It was so essential to consider such an important undertaking from all sides before making a decision.

"By all means, Bell," he repeated. "I'm wasting your time."

As he drove home alone in the Stanhope, he decided that he had certainly done the wise thing in not pledging Dickie to five years' service; and he was, also, inclined to congratulate himself on the compromise he had effected with regard to the sale of stock—by giving instructions to sell only one share, he had still kept intact that comfortable £1000 which was so much more substantial a figure than £900. The small overdraft might be made good by putting a little pressure on the tenant of the Glebe Farm, who owed arrears that would more than wipe out the balance. That resource was always in reserve and had never yet been called upon.

The aroma of the cigar, he always smoked as he drove home from Medborough, seemed to him rather sweeter than usual.

III

The discussion of Dickie's immediate future fluttered about the supper table that evening; and the comforting fact that nothing could be "settled" until they received Bell's decision with regard to the term of probation, came continually to the surface and gave the problem the air of pleasant unreality.

"But let us *suppose*," Adela said with great earnestness, "let us suppose that Mr. Bell says he must go for five years, what then?"

"What's the good of debating on an uncertain assumption?" asked Latimer, and he and his sister nearly quarrelled before it was agreed to play Adela's game for a time.

"It settles it one way, in any case," she concluded. "If we decide that he ought to go if it's to be for five years, he would certainly go if it were only for three."

"Suppose that we decide that he shouldn't," put in Latimer. He was divided between jealousy of Dickie's ability to relieve the family distress, and a fear that he, himself, might be called upon to throw up his scholarship and be turned out without a degree to make a living as an assistant master in some preparatory school. Adela's opposition was merely a temporary stimulus to range himself on the dissenting side.

The weight of opinion was against Adela on her supposition.

"I shouldn't like to bind him for so long," Mr. Lynneker said.

"He'd only be twenty-two then," Adela argued.

"I can't picture Dickie as being twenty-two," her mother interpolated inconsequently. She had a vision of her last baby sturdily trying to balance himself on his heels at the age of fourteen months. He had been the best tempered of all her babies and the most backward.

When that side issue had been disposed of by Adela's

description of her little brother with a white beard, signing Bank of England notes, they returned almost unanimously to the decision that five years was too long.

Dickie, himself, took little part in the game. He seemed to think his immediate duty was to eat a reasonable amount of the coarse and rather muddy bream that had been the one important trophy of the fishing expedition. The rest of the family had preferred the alternative of cutlets.

"You seem to like it," Latimer remarked presently, leaning forward to stare with critical disapproval across the table.

"It's all right," remarked Dickie, and suddenly decided that he had done all that was required of him in that direction. After he had transferred his plate and the remains of the bream to the sideboard, he started cheerfully on the two tepid cutlets that had been kept for him.

"You haven't told us what you feel about it all, Dick," his father said.

"Oh! I'm going to take it on, of course," replied Dickie.

"I don't know that I should care to pledge you for five years," Mr. Lynneker submitted.

"That'll be all right," mumbled Dickie. Plainly the bream and the City & County were in the same category as far as he was concerned.

"Of course you don't in the least realise what you're going to do," Latimer said; and his mother asked her youngest son if he "really thought he would like being in a Bank"; a failure to understand the essential issue that had the effect of silencing her husband. He cherished the certainty that Bell would be reasonable and admit the shorter period to be sufficient; and that Dickie would wonderfully go to Cambridge eventually, as a Lynneker should.

IV

But Mr. Bell was firm on this occasion. His letter came the next morning, and in defiance of precedent, Adela

begged that it might be opened at the breakfast-table. The manager's argument was perfectly reasonable. He pointed out that in a small local Bank, run by himself with only, at present, two assistants, it was impossible so to divide the work that the junior should be excluded from a general knowledge of the various accounts; a reservoir of secrets that was of the utmost importance in the life of a provincial town. While the clerks were in the Bank's employ, they were under bond, and the sense of their fiduciary capacity was sufficient to keep them loyal to their agreement. But if the clerks were constantly changed, some of the Bank's customers might reasonably feel uneasy. In Mr. Lynneker's case there could be no reason to doubt that the Bank's secrets would be faithfully kept, but unhappily Mr. Bell could not take upon himself the responsibility of creating a new precedent in this connexion. If he accepted Mr. Richard Lynneker, at the end of three years another of the Bank's clientèle might be offended by the refusal of similar terms.

None of the Lynnekers had enough knowledge of the usual terms of employment in Banks to be surprised at Mr. Bell's stipulation. They approached such technicalities as these without curiosity. But the truth of the matter was that the manager of the City & County had recently lost two accounts owing to the indiscretions of a dismissed clerk. The affair had come to the Directors and Brian Lessing, the chairman, had casually suggested the advisability of not employing a local man, except under a five years' agreement. And fresh from that check to the steady confirmation of his tedious achievements, Mr. Bell had determined to observe that suggestion with the greatest exactitude.

The Rector exhibited signs of annoyance when he had read the letter aloud to his family; and more particularly he was annoyed with Adela for her insistence.

"What are we going to do, now?" she asked innocently; and her father snubbed her by replying,

"My dear child, you must leave that question to me."

Latimer looked glum. He thought the general outlook distinctly unpromising, and when, after a strained silence, his father left the table, announced that it was "all up with the Bank scheme."

"The pater's got his knife into Bell for sticking to the five years," he explained.

Dickie looked as if he did not care one way or the other, and Mrs. Lynneker sighed and remarked that she was not altogether sorry.

"All jolly fine, mater," Latimer said, "but I suppose it means my going down."

"Of course you don't care what Dickie has to do, as long as you're not interfered with," Adela put in acidly; not because she wished especially to champion Dickie, but because she was glad of an opportunity to relieve her temper. She hated to be snubbed "before people."

Latimer frowned sulkily. "It isn't that at all," he grumbled, trying to think of some reasonable defence. "I mean it isn't as if Dickie minds going into the Bank; he's jolly keen on it; aren't you, Dickie?"

"Not particularly," Dickie said quietly.

"There you are," snapped Adela as if she had scored a point.

"Well, what on earth are you so set on it for, then?" asked Latimer suspiciously.

"Somebody's got to do something," Dickie returned. "We're always talking about things and nobody's any further at the end of it."

He had no sense of being heroic and his mother embarrassed him when she said, "*You* are always doing things, dear," and added: "We expect you to retrieve the family fortunes." She gave her speech the air of a quotation from popular melodrama, but it was quite clear that she recognised in her youngest son some quality that she found in neither of his elder brothers.

"Oh! Dickie's a wonderful child," commented Latimer. "He'll probably blunder into something one of these days."

Dickie dug his hands into his trouser pockets and grinned.

"Anyhow, what are you going to *do*, now?" asked Adela.

"Go into the Bank," returned Dickie.

"For five years?"

"I suppose so."

"And if the pater won't let you?"

"He will," Dickie affirmed confidently.

"Are you going in to see him about it?" asked Latimer. Dickie nodded.

"Well, look here, I shouldn't see him this morning, if I were you," was Latimer's advice. "He's fearfully shirty with Bell, and he'll probably refuse to discuss it with you at all. You'd miles better wait until he's settled down a bit, if you really mean to stick to the idea. Don't do it to please me, though, for goodness' sake. I don't care a little hang one way or the other."

"I shouldn't do it to please you," Dickie replied seriously, and Adela laughed and said, "Good old Dickie."

"I know you're being splendidly heroic," snapped Latimer.

"Richard to the rescue of the family!" put in Mrs. Lynneker gaily, trying to divert the conversation into less acrimonious courses. "Richard shall go and fight the Medborough Saracens for us."

"Well, if you take my advice, you won't see the pater this morning," Latimer concluded and left the room before his sister could make any further assault upon him.

"Latimer's most beastly selfish," she remarked.

"Oh! he's all right," Dickie said, adding another to his list of tolerations. "But I'll see the pater now," he added. "I want to get this settled."

His mother and sister regarded him with open admiration as he walked across the hall and knocked at the door of his father's study.

V

The interview was brief and decisive.

Mr. Lynneker's petulant opposition to the scheme had

run its usual course and produced moral fatigue. His outbreak of annoyance at breakfast had marked a climax, and now he wanted to be on easy terms again with his family. He knew that all of them, with the possible exception of his wife, would approve sending Dickie to the Bank.

He recognised the strain of selfishness that prompted his children's inclination and was aware that his own motives were equally biassed. And he deprecated that bias and in his own futile way had fought against it. But, now, he was willing to fall back on the excuse that circumstances had been too strong for him. He had given Dick every chance of avoiding this derogatory clerkship; if the boy insisted on taking it, he did it with his eyes open.

This last evasion was the immediate palliative that presented itself. It offered the excuse for a perfectly reasonable hesitation. Dick's eyes must be clearly opened; he must never have an opportunity to say that he had been driven into this slavery.

When Dickie's knock came to the study door his father was already prepared and he welcomed the chance to have the affair settled while he was in the mood. He meant to be perfectly just, to put the case without a shadow of prejudice.

"Sit down, my boy," he said, when Dickie had come in. "I want you just to listen to me for a few moments."

Dickie accepted both invitations without comment. He was always glad to be treated reasonably.

There were but two arguments to be explained, and Mr. Lynneker found that both could be briefly stated. The first was with regard to Dickie's future career. "This clerkship may prejudice your chances," was the effect of that statement. "You won't want to begin school again at twenty-two by taking a University course, and you won't be prepared for any of the professions."

Dickie nodded. "Yes, pater, go on," he said. "I won't say anything until you've finished."

"The second point, dear boy," Mr. Lynneker continued, "is that I feel this clerkship is rather . . . well, a little *infra dig.*, eh? It isn't quite an occupation I should have chosen for you. Very modern, no doubt; but I confess that it rather goes against the grain . . ." he paused undecidedly, as if uncertain whether he had said enough under that head.

"I don't see that that matters much, does it?" Dickie said, as his father still hesitated.

"You wouldn't feel that you would be losing position . . ." Mr. Lynneker began.

"I don't mean to stick to it after the five years, you see," Dickie explained. "I don't know whether Mr. Bell ought to be told that. Perhaps he ought. But I'm not a slacker, you know, pater. I'm going to work in my own time while I'm in the Bank; and I expect in a year or two I'll know better what sort of thing to go in for. I haven't thought of anything yet, except astronomy. Really I only thought of that because it seemed to give some kind of chance to a chap who was any good at maths, like J. C. Adams, you know. And, anyhow, I think I'd feel more comfortable if I was earning something."

"It might be possible to find another opening for you," Mr. Lynneker ventured.

"This one is all ready and I might begin at once," Dickie returned. "I mean, wouldn't it be rather a waste of time looking about for something else? I don't see that the Bank's half bad. They're shortish hours, anyhow. Oh! and, pater, I've been thinking, wouldn't it be a jolly good thing for me to get a bicycle, not a high wheel, mater's so funky about them. I could get a "safety" at Pearson's for about eight quid and it would save the price of the season-ticket and any amount of time. If you could advance the money, I could pay you back out of my screw, you know."

"We might think about it, certainly," his father agreed.

"Give me a certain amount of ekkers, too," added Dickie, piling up his argument. He had picked up the abbrevia-

tion of exercise from Edward, who had had a bad attack of cutting his words and adding "er" to the stem during his first year at Cambridge.

Mr. Lynneker agreed that the safety bicycle was unquestionably an idea that must be considered. He was, indeed, planning to give Dickie ten pounds to buy it—another salve for his conscience—but that was to be a "surprise." Meanwhile he had to write to Barnard.

VI

Dr. Barnard extorted no penalty. He was able to fill the one empty place in his own house, even at that eleventh hour, and when he had made certain of that, he wrote a very charming letter to express his regret that so promising a boy as Richard Lynneker should be leaving the school just when he seemed to have overcome various temperamental disabilities and to be well on the way to a scholarship.

Mr. Lynneker kept that letter among certain other treasured papers.

And for many months he had moments, decreasing in poignancy as time went on, in which he saw again the visions of that triumphant speech-day; and wondered if he might not have made some sacrifice to give his youngest son a better chance.

The only confidence he gave to his wife was contained in the remark that "the dear boy had been so splendid about it all."

Mrs. Lynneker agreed with enthusiasm. Dickie's employment had made a difference of £160 a year in their income, and she was permitting herself and Adela a few minor extravagances.

V

MEDBOROUGH

I

AMONG the outstanding influences that marked the course of his life during the next two years, Dickie would probably have given an important place to the purchase of his bicycle. That machine—a second-hand “Rover” safety, with cushion tyres—gave him independence, and curiously linked the diverse experiences of Medborough and Halton. . . .

Medborough took on a new aspect when he went to work there. Until then, it had made other claims on his attention. He remembered it first as a place where one had tea and enticingly unfamiliar cakes at Hopkinson’s, the confectioner in Broad Street—comparatively rare celebrations for him, as the Stanhope would only hold four, and Edward, Latimer and his two sisters were given the precedence due to seniority. Usually he had gone in alone with his mother, by train, on those occasions.

More recently Medborough had been regarded either as a shopping centre that offered many attractive things,—tools, bicycles and guns, for example,—all quite beyond reach; or as a place of diversion. He had been in to hear Corney Grain at the Drill Hall, or to see a cricket-match.

But in all these aspects, the town had been a rather remote, perfectly distinct place, to be visited only in holiday mood; a place of objective men and women, mainly shopkeepers, who were never visualised as moving from their counters or as having any other interests and man-

ners than those they displayed to customers. The exceptions were almost exclusively cathedral clergy, encountered casually in the street, or living in grey stone and old red brick houses within the precincts; houses that opened ecclesiastical, nail-studded front doors to receive his father and mother, possibly Edward and his two sisters, but were barred against gauche, rather untidily dressed schoolboys of fifteen or so, who were left to wander about the cloisters or stare in at the windows of Bailey, the ironmonger.

The first day in the Bank altered these impressions for Dickie.

Alfred Bailey, himself, the owner of those amazingly attractive tools he so carelessly displayed, came into the City & County early on Monday morning, and nodded to Dickie at his side desk as to an equal. Mr. Bailey was no longer a servant waiting upon small Lynneker demands, with a placatory smile, but a customer with a respectable account, a man to be propitiated by the employee of the Bank.

The unexpectedness of the phenomenon demanded attention.

At the moment Dickie was inclined to resent the familiarity of that casual nod. It had no precedent in his experience. He was accustomed to the subservience of all Medborough trades-people, and to some hint of respect from any member of what he had been led to regard as the lower classes. He had had no preparation for this sudden sweeping away of social barriers. Mr. Bell had been properly polite in his reception of the Bank's new clerk. There had been no perceptible change in his manner that morning.

Dickie returned the nod with a touch of hauteur, and occupied himself with the simple copying of figures that was to be his introduction to the complexities of book-keeping.

But Mr. Bailey was not to be dismissed so easily. After he had announced that he was going to Sheffield that afternoon, and had taken ten pounds in gold to cash the cheque

he presented, he looked across at Dickie's corner and remarked in a resonant voice,

"Got a new clerk, Bell."

"We've been understaffed for the last three months," Mr. Bell replied.

"Oh!" commented Mr. Bailey, and then directly addressing Dickie, he said, "Young Mr. Lynneker, isn't it?"

Mr. Bell turned round and Dickie understood that he was expected to reply.

"Yes, my name is Lynneker," he said.

"I've known your father this thirty year," stated Mr. Bailey, "and I think I remember seein' you in my shop a time or two."

"I've bought a few tools there," Dickie admitted.

"Fond of carpent'ring?" asked Bailey.

"I do a little," Dickie said.

Mr. Bailey nodded and carefully stowed away his gold in a flatleather purse. Then he pressed his square-crowned, hard felt hat a little more firmly on his head, pulled down his waistcoat, gave another nod to the office in general, said, "Well, good mornin' to you, gentlemen," and went out.

Mr. Bell continued his work without making any comment.

Dickie ran his fingers through his hair, and as he proceeded with his mechanical copying, came to some consideration of the difficult proposition that Alfred Bailey was not a public-serving automaton, but an individual to be considered and, if necessary, propitiated by a member of the old and aristocratic family of Lynneker.

Mr. Bailey had come wonderfully to life. Dickie remembered, now, that he had heard the ironmonger's name mentioned as a probable candidate for the mayoralty. Also, he was a churchwarden of St. Peter's, the parish church of Medborough.

And with Mr. Bailey's sudden development into a person of consequence, Medborough itself began strangely to grow and take a new form. It no longer wore the air of an

amusing dependency of Halton, but had become the centre of a large circle of the dim circumference of which were dozens of little parishes such as that from which Dickie had ridden out that morning. Halton, Thrapley, Allerton, Great and Little Milton, and all the rest of those more or less familiar villages, were from the Medborough tradesman's point of view so many sources of custom, and comparatively unimportant, even so.

II

And there was Bradshaw. . . .

Dickie had seen him in the town a few weeks before and had commented on his appearance to Latimer, who had not observed the odd phenomenon, or thought it beneath his notice; had not, in any case, displayed the least interest.

"That was a rum looking chap," had been Dickie's description; and Mark Bradshaw's appearance certainly deserved some distinctive adjective.

Ordinary people of Bradshaw's physique would be described as tall and thin; he demanded some less human account such as long and narrow. His little shoulders were perfectly square and he gave the effect of being parallel-sided, just an unduly protracted square slip of a man who could never be likened to anything so rounded as a lamp-post.

And as a superfluous addition to that extended parallelogram he had a long narrow face with a square jaw and more chin than the strongest face could carry without an effect of exaggeration; an expanse of chin that distracted the attention from the attempt at balance contrived by an almost perfectly square box of forehead.

Between those rival spaces a small mouth, a short, straight nose and little bright brown eyes were hopelessly tucked away and neglected. These peculiarities would have been sufficient eccentricity for any one but the de-

signer of Mark Bradshaw, but by way of completing the grotesque, his hair had been arranged in three separate waves, one over each ear and one down the centre of his head, and these curling tufts were separated from each other by neat bald pathways like very wide partings.

He had been bare-headed when Dickie had seen him in the Market Place, and any one less preoccupied than Latimer (he had just been buying ties) must have been startled into the search for an adjective. Dickie was aware that "rum-looking" was quite inadequate; but he had not attempted any more detailed experiment to recall the abstracted attention of his brother. Latimer was not interested in the peculiarities of "common people."

It was an immense shock to Dickie to find that this queer-looking fellow was to be his colleague in the Bank. The fact had all the air of an astonishing coincidence, and Dickie pondered it and tentatively classified it as belonging to the same class as the vivifying of Mr. Bailey. Once or twice he glanced covertly in Bradshaw's direction, ashamed to look at him openly, as he might have been ashamed of staring at some crippling disfigurement.

But that problem, at least, was solved for him when Mr. Bell went upstairs to his dinner at a quarter past twelve, leaving the senior clerk, Cartwright, in charge.

There were no depositors in the Bank at that moment, and Bradshaw got up when Mr. Bell went out, walked across the office and took a vacant stool next to Dickie.

"Shoo!" remarked Bradshaw, and when Dickie looked up, began very solemnly to waggle his amazing chin.

"Have a good look and get used to it," he said. "You'll find that the pain relaxes after a few minutes. Some people find this contortion more engaging," he added, and shot out his chin in an extraordinary grimace that entirely finished Dickie.

"Oh! Good Lord," he exclaimed, and was overtaken with a convulsion of laughter.

"Better, better;" Bradshaw prompted him. "You're passing the crisis nicely. I've known young children scream

and faint for less. Try another position!" And he proceeded to exhibit the further possibilities of that astonishing face of his.

"Oh! don't," gasped Dickie. "I shall have a fit or something."

Cartwright, with his back to the counter, looked on with interested amusement.

"Cartwright has reached the point of enduring, even of enjoying the sight of my misfit, you notice," Bradford said, when Dickie had reached a stage of weeping recovery. "I've been a little brutal with you, because it saves time and misunderstandings. I've found that it's no good trying to talk to people until they've passed the phase of trying to giggle without my seeing 'em. And I like talking to people. Feeling any better? Hm?"

"I shall be all right if you won't *do* things with it, you know," Dickie said, still balanced on the verge of hysterical laughter.

"Gross flattery," commented Bradshaw. "I know I'm a freak, man. For God's sake don't be polite. I see the girls in the street nudge each other when they see me coming. And when I take off my hat to 'em, they're finished. They have to hold each other up, or else lean against a wall and give way to it. Once I sang 'Beauty's Eyes' at a concert in the Drill Hall, and if Corney Grain had been there he'd have chucked the funny business for sheer shame; Corney Grain's recitals were like a prayer-meeting alongside of the reception I had for 'Beauty's Eyes.' When I got to 'I need no star in Heaven to guide me,' the bobby in the Minster Yard half a mile away let off as fast as he could go for the mayor to read the riot act, and I've heard he rang up the fire station on the way to be on the safe side."

"Oh! for goodness' sake, shut up," gasped Dickie.

Cartwright, a fair, young man with smooth hair, listened with a fixed, attentive smile. "He ought to go on the stage," he remarked, when Bradshaw stopped, "as a popular entertainer. I've often told him he'd make his fortune."

Bradshaw shook his head and pressed his button mouth into a thin line. Dickie fancied he saw some suggestion of pathos in the bright little brown eyes, but Cartwright, who had only smiled before, suddenly broke into a cackle of laughter.

"Gosh, Braddie, you are a licker," he said, wiping his eyes.

The creak of the outer pair of swing doors leading to the street interrupted the comedy. Cartwright was instantly at attention, suave and eager as a shop-walker; while Bradshaw got to his feet and turning his back on the counter, leaned over Dickie's ledger as if he were deeply engaged in the Company's business.

"Cartwright goes to his lunch when Mr. Bell comes in," he observed in an undertone, "and when Cartwright returns at a quarter to two sharp, I go. I bring sandwiches with me and eat 'em in the boot-cupboard, and then exhibit myself for half an hour in order to put Medborough in a good temper." Then he went on in a louder voice, "Have you checked the cast on each slip? You ought to and tick 'em again. Merely a matter of form, but nothing counts as passed till it's been ticked twice. *You* can go out when you like, you're merely an accessory at present; and I was going to suggest that you might join my procession if you can bear it."

"I should like to," Dickie said.

III

That walk after lunch added another to Dickie's new impressions of Medborough.

As they crossed the Market Place, Bradshaw was still playing the fool for his companion's benefit. He took off his hat to two young women they met, stuck out his chin and made a stiff, elaborate bow; a performance that certainly had the effect of making the young women giggle, although they looked, also, a trifle scared, and looked back

once or twice with a faint apprehension after they had passed.

But when they came into the Minster Yard, Bradshaw looked keenly at Dickie and said:

"Struck me when I first saw you, Lynneker, that you weren't one of the giggling sort."

"I don't think I am," agreed Dickie.

"May seem a paradox to you," Bradshaw went on, "but I'm not altogether stuck on the funny business. It's been forced on me, you see. I've got into a way of sticking my chin through a collar, if you follow me, to give people an excuse for laughing."

"I couldn't help it this morning," Dickie apologised.

"Naturally. I could set you off again, now, if I wanted to," Bradshaw returned, exhibiting a curious pride in the power he had just been depreciating. "I'm not always in the mood, you understand, but when I lay myself out . . ." He paused as if doubtful whether he would not, now, make further experiment on Dickie, and then looked up at the great West Front of the Cathedral, waved his hand vaguely and said:

"Mean anything to you, this sort of thing?"

"The Cathedral?" asked Dickie.

The afternoon sun cast great shadows into the depths of the three immense arches of the West Front. The delicate, serene mass of it towered overwhelmingly higher than the buildings of the old King's School and the houses on the south side of the Minster Yard. The row of great elms on the north side, straining against the assault of the bright October gale, were dwarfed into insignificance; and the little figures of men and women dotted about the paths that cut the neat grass of the yard into sharp rhombuses and triangles, were so utterly remote and small, it seemed incredible that that great elevation could have been built by the hands of so petty a race.

Bradshaw nodded.

"I don't know that it does," Dickie said. "It's never struck me particularly. Does it mean anything to you?"

Bradshaw's grotesque face was absurdly solemn as he replied. "Doesn't it impress you?" he asked.

"In what way?" asked the rather puzzled Dickie.

"Of course, if you don't feel it . . ." returned Bradshaw.

"Never thought about it," Dickie admitted.

"Well, even on its historical side . . ."

"What historical side?"

"As a piece of building."

"Go on," Dickie said.

"The nave's Norman, you know," Bradshaw explained, "and then a hundred years or so later a fresh lot of beggars, monks I suppose, came along and just jabbed that front on to the end of it. They didn't bother particularly to make it fit, or to make any sort of match with the old stuff, they just barged in and built that. That's the way they felt about building a cathedral. Pretty well got it, too, didn't they? Dignity and solemnity and all that.

"Then, another couple of hundred years after them some silly idiots built that porch into the middle arch. Pity! And now the whole affair's supposed to be falling forwards and they're talking of tying it in with steel girders. That's history enough, isn't it? Can't you see the little fellows swarming about all over it like flies on a house-front, chipping and hammering,—tiny little chaps they must have looked up there, and yet they left that behind 'em when they'd done. Terrific, I call it."

Dickie felt slightly uncomfortable. He was not ripe yet for the tremendous bouleversement necessary before he could cease to regard Medborough Cathedral as among the classified things,—such as Cæsar's Gallic Wars or the signing of Magna Carta,—and look upon it as a magic memorial of his ancestors' thought and feeling.

"I'm afraid I'm an awful duffer at architecture," he said with a schoolboy sheepishness. "Are you keen on it?"

"Oh! architecture and lots of other subjects like that interest me," Bradshaw returned airily. "I like to imagine

the things happening. The cloisters, now. You know about them, of course?"

"I don't," confessed Dickie.

Bradshaw, with one of his odd, stiff gestures, hooked him by the arm. "Oh! that ought to wake you up, anyhow," he said.

But when he reached the cloisters, he paused before he began his exposition and pointed up at the vast enclosing solidity of the nave and South transept.

"I always feel about half a centimetre high, when I stand here," he remarked.

"It is tremendous," agreed Dickie.

"The tower's new, of course," Bradshaw went on. "It was all pulled down and rebuilt a few years ago and they added those pepper-castors at the corners. Don't like 'em much, do you?"

They stood for a few moments craning their necks to stare up at the impending cliff of grey masonry—the newly-built tower, above, shone cream white on the rain-washed sunlight of the windy October afternoon.

"Fine, don't you think?" asked Bradshaw.

"Yes, it is fine," Dickie said. "I don't seem to have noticed it like this, before."

"Oh! you'll get to like it more and more," Bradshaw said with enthusiasm. "And the cloisters, all smashed up by Cromwell's fellows in 1643. Can't you see 'em at it? Burnt the best part of this bit, of course. All that black stuff's the mark of the fire. You can't get it off with your finger. It has just stained the stone, I suppose; all the cindery stuff been washed off years ago, no doubt."

Dickie had always assumed that the comparatively low stone wall of the quadrangle, with its niches and blackened carving, had been originally built like that. No one had ever enlightened him, and he had taken the cloisters for granted together with the rest of the Cathedral and its precincts. And, although he was too callow, as yet, to suffer any great change of attitude, even on that first day in Medborough he began to have some suspicion that

many of the things he had hitherto despised as "tosh" might possibly be worth knowing.

The thought passed through his mind, as Bradshaw warmed to his reconstruction of the past and attempted a picture of Cromwell's Ironsides ravishing the interior of the Minster;—passed, and left an ineradicable trace of its passage.

"You can't blame 'em in a way," Bradshaw concluded. "They were up against every sort of toggery; and just wild with all Roman Catholic and Cavalier notions—sort of different race to them—lost their wool completely like the people in the French Revolution. I say it's time we went back, old man."

IV

Other people in Medborough came to life for Dickie on that first day in the City & County. There was, for instance, a whisper behind the Bank counter that young Wetherall, who owned the big draper's business in Priestgate, could not hang on much longer. Apparently the Bank knew what no one else in the town had guessed, namely, that young Wetherall had been speculating foolishly in mining stocks. His inner financial history was all written in the City & County's ledgers and any one who was skilled in the use of those mysterious volumes might read the story of young Wetherall's life.

Nothing could be hidden from the quiet eyes of Mr. Bell. He knew the secret history of the town's business and never suggested the profundity of his knowledge by so much as a change of manner. When some unfortunate, who had long been marked down as unsafe, came to beg the privilege of an overdraft, he was refused with just that same air of deference with which the manager welcomed an original shareholder, or my Lord, the Bishop.

For those remorseless columns of figures gave entrance even to the private life of the Palace. They were full of

the strangest significance, a hieroglyphic character revealing mysteries that no other records could show. The permutations of those ten numerals could express the depths of tragedy more surely than any language; the misery of the steadily declining balance, the effort expressed by the reduction in the amounts of those weekly cheques payable to self; the final horror of that terrible draft for a few shillings to close the account. But after that the investigator was faced by a blank silence. The Bank knew nothing of the unfortunate depositor's future;—in the hieroglyphic character bankruptcy was death.

Dickie did not come at once to any appreciation of the occult significance of the books in his charge. As junior ledger clerk, he had no means of collating his items, and could strike no financial or moral balance. He did not, at first, have access to that collection of dossiers, bound in white parchment, where the private life of the individual was recorded in the convenient ciphers that were the Bank's sole means of expression, the only language of which it took any account. But the astounding novelty of it all impressed him with a sense of new values, and the sight of his bicycle standing in the back premises of the City & County, was like the vision of some forgotten thing coming up out of the past.

During the past ten days, that bicycle had gathered to itself a group of associations with Halton Rectory. He had discussed it with Latimer, cleaned it in the stable yard with Adela as an interested onlooker. The sight of the crank cotter he had hammered and slightly damaged, immediately recalled her enquiry as to why women should not ride bicycles; and their subsequent discussion in which Adela had advocated some kind of rational costume and he had suggested that the frame of the safety might be adapted to suit the inconvenience of skirts.

And when he had mounted and ridden down the cobbled streets of Medborough, had safely passed the two level crossings of the Great Northern Railway and was able to increase his pace on the excellent surface of the Thrap-

ley road, the day's experiences began to fall into an altered perspective. The recognitions of individuality in Mr. Bailey, young Wetherall and the Cathedral; the odd appearance and personality of Bradshaw, the smell of the calf-bound ledgers, all began to take a new shape. They were falling into Halton classifications. In a few minutes he would cease to be a bank clerk, subject to the casual greeting of ironmongers and drapers, and would return without effort to his position as the youngest son of the Rector—the villagers would touch their hats to him as he rode past.

Between those two different worlds, the bicycle flung a bridge. When he saw it standing in the coach-house at home it reminded him of the Bank. When he was in Medborough it was full of associations with Halton. The bicycle stood to him as a symbol, something that shared his two lives and in some sense related them.

VI

THE BEGINNING OF REASON

I

IF Dickie had been a mathematical genius such as his hero, J. C. Adams, he might have walked into that enceinte of particular learning which confines the outlook of the specialist. At Oakstone he had been distinguished inasmuch as he was, at seventeen, unquestionably the best mathematician in the school; a distinction that had tended to impress upon him a false scale of values. He had dreamed vaguely of becoming senior wrangler, and of discovering a ninth major planet circling behind the orbit of Neptune.

He came to a recognition of his own limitations during the first six months of his work at the Bank. The promise to read in his spare time was scrupulously fulfilled. He read for two hours every morning before breakfast, and all that winter denied himself the invigoration of his half-mile morning run down to the river. (In his taste for cold water, at least, he was his father's son. Mr. Lynneker had bathed in the river every morning summer and winter until he was sixty, and still went in the warmer weather. Edward and Latimer had never accompanied him during the Christmas holidays; and Dickie had been too young then, but he had taken up the tradition on his own account when he was fifteen.) In addition to these two quiet hours before breakfast, he put in another hour and a half before supper, and if he took that time for cleaning his bicycle or for some odd job of carpentering, he worked from half-past eight until half-past ten, with an interval of a quarter of

an hour for family prayers. Also, there was the Thursday half-holiday, and he worked, surreptitiously, on Sundays.

Adela and his mother occasionally urged that he was overdoing it, the latter from purely disinterested motives, the former because she wanted Dickie's company. He met them both with the quiet assurance that he wanted to work and meant to work. Adela accused him of being selfish. . . .

II

The discovery of his own limitations was a slow process.

He had boldly attacked the calculus, and found many reasons in succession for his failure to master the finer subtleties of mathematical reasoning. He had gone on too quickly, was his first deduction; but a return to the calculus after a month's steady grind at less difficult work, found him with no firmer grasp of the theorems than he had had before. After that he leaned to the suggestion that he had "gone stale," and by way of rest took up the subject of "Banking," borrowing various works from the collection of Mr. Bell. Then he decided that he ought to have help, realised that no help was available, and suffered a period of discontent and unrest, during which he went back over old ground again and cursed himself as a "slacker"—the most opprobrious term he knew.

That period was ended for him by an apparently irrelevant incident.

Parliament was to meet in a few weeks' time, and the arch-criminal was proposing to bring in his villainous bill for the disruption of the Empire. The country about Medborough was immensely anxious and disturbed. Meetings were being held in every possible place, and a lecturer was engaged by Mr. Lynneker to expound the atrocities of Mr. Gladstone in the Infant School-room at Halton.

Dickie accepted all his father's pronouncements on that

subject of Radical iniquity without question; and he was a little ashamed of the fact that he did not resent the wickedness of Mr. Gladstone as bitterly as he undoubtedly ought to resent it. Even Bradshaw had been warmed to a glow of indignation, and had deplored the congenital handicap which prevented his being taken seriously on public occasions.

"I'd like to have a chance to let myself go about the Home Rule Bill," Bradshaw had said one afternoon; and Mr. Bell and Cartwright had murmured their sympathy with his aspirations.

Dickie attributed his own tepidity to ignorance, and decided to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the meeting in the Halton school-room. Mr. Lynneker warmly approved his son's interest in so urgent a matter.

The lecturer, familiarly spoken of in the town as "young Charlie Evans," was a red-faced, sandy-haired, amazingly-freckled young man of thirty or so, with a powerful voice and a vehement manner. He was a partner in the principal firm of auctioneers and estate agents in Medborough, and was accounted a valuable asset by the Conservative Association. He had been second speaker at important gatherings through the winter, and had been complimented on more than one occasion by the member, Lord William March.

The Halton meeting was held at six o'clock for the convenience of labourers who went to bed at seven in the winter months. The school-room could hold a hundred and fifty people and when Ford, the village policeman, had, at Mr. Lynneker's request, herded in the rabble, who would have preferred to remain just outside the door, the place was nearly full. Many of the labourers had brought their wives—free entertainments were rare in Halton, for even missionary meetings closed with the pressing invitation of "a collection" which it was hardly decent to ignore—and the wives had brought the children who were too young to be left at home.

Mr. Lynneker opened the proceedings with a few bitter remarks about Mr. Gladstone, that failed to rouse the en-

thusiasm of the general audience, and then Mr. Evans jumped to his feet as if he had not a moment to spare and plunged into his exposition of what the Home Rule Bill would do for the Empire. He had brought with him an immense map which had been hung on the wall at the back of the platform, and he began with a tactical treatise. The map displayed the whole of the British Isles, and, at the bottom, the nose of France, poking out nearly as far West as the Lizard. That nose was, indeed, the chief feature of the earlier argument.

"Cut off Ireland from English rule," was the gist of Mr. Evans's heated demonstration of possibilities under this head, "and you laid England open to invasion by the French." He emphasised the certainty of that disaster with a walking stick as a pointer, sliding about the near Atlantic, and exhibiting the straightness of the line from Brest to Cork. He admitted that it might be possible to guard the Channel and the East Coast, but it seemed that no power on earth could stop the French from crossing the Irish Sea, once they had landed at Queenstown.

In the loyalty of the Irish people, Mr. Evans had no faith whatever. He hinted that the demand for a separate Parliament was but the opening stage of a policy that aimed at the final subjugation—with French help—of the whole English people; and he became so hot and angry and loud that many of the audience began to have awful doubts of the safety of their walk home. If this invasion were so easy, the thing might have been already accomplished; why, after all, should the French wait for such a trifle as the passing of this particular bill?

The second part of Mr. Evans's speech, however, raised them from their depression. He dropped his walking stick, resolutely turned his back on the map, and came to the front of the platform. He expatiated on the glories of the British Empire; he gave every member of the audience his due for the share he or she had taken in building up these glories; he became fearfully impassioned, waved his hairy, freckled hands in thick and stubborn

gestures of denunciation or appeal and came at last to a peroration on the duty of every man to save his country from political, financial and moral ruin.

When he sat down with a vigour that saved the least suggestion of anti-climax, the applause, earnestly led by Mr. Lynneker, was all that a speaker could desire. Mr. Evans had to suspend the long-neglected duty of wiping the perspiration from his face, in order to bow his acknowledgements.

There had been no interruptions while he was speaking; it would, indeed, have taken a confident man to attempt any opposition to that tremendous, unslackening power of lung; but as the Rectory party passed out through the porch into the school field, a group of youths, dimly seen in the darkness, laughed rudely, and a jeering voice called out, "Three cheers for Billy Gladstone."

"That was young Bellamy," Mr. Lynneker said severely when they were out of hearing of the mob, and explained to Mr. Evans that young Bellamy was the black sheep of the parish.

Mr. Evans had been invited to supper at the Rectory.

III

He was seen to less advantage on the drawing-room hearth-rug or across the supper-table. His collar had suffered by the neglect of his handkerchief while speaking, and was badly buckled on the right side, a defect that he tried to remedy by continually pulling at its upper edge. Also, he was very conscious of no longer being nervous in clerical society. On the platform his speech had been astonishingly fluent, and he relied on the same gift of words to tide him over the awkwardness of the social entertainment. His talk was all of politics, and he was never at a loss for an opinion. He appeared to have finally made up his mind on every point connected with the policy of the government, its effect upon every class of voter and the steps

that must be taken to combat it. Finally, he never addressed one of the company without mentioning them by name.

"A very attentive meeting," the Rector suggested when he had an opportunity to turn the conversation from the general to the particular.

"Yes, Mr. Lynneker," Evans agreed. "I have found all my meetings recently well attended and well received. The country, as a whole, is very strong against the present programme. If we had a general election at the present moment, Mr. Lynneker, we should come home with a very large majority."

"I should like to see that infamous scoundrel horse-whipped out of the country," the Rector commented, and there was no need to point the application of his remark.

"We shall get rid of him without that, Mr. Lynneker," Evans said, and proceeded to outline the means.

Dickie listened and found himself singularly unimpressed. He was too near the life of a public-school to have been roused to any enthusiasm by the wordy patriotism of the speech in the school-room, and certain doubts that had been fermenting in his mind took the form of a question in the drawing-room after supper.

"I say," he said when he found a chance, "d'you really believe there's any chance of a French invasion?"

"It's highly improbable, Mr. Lynneker," Evans replied, "but it is a possibility that must be considered."

"But you made it your chief point, to-night," Dickie persisted, and his father looked up at him with a nod of approval. He liked to see his boys holding their own intelligently.

"For a rustic audience, Mr. Lynneker," Evans explained. "We have to get hold of 'em and shake 'em. They ought never to have been given the vote, but as they've got it, we must teach 'em how to use it, and we have to talk to 'em in words they can understand."

"Then you don't believe, yourself, that this invasion business is a particularly good argument against Home Rule! at least not for educated people."

"Well, no, Mr. Lynneker, there are better arguments; for instance . . ."

"Oh! I'm sure there are," Dickie interrupted. "I only wanted to make certain that that one was bunkum. It struck me it must be when I heard it."

"Come, come, Dick," put in Mr. Lynneker, on a note of admonishment. "One must adapt oneself to the necessities of one's audience, eh, Evans?"

"One certainly must, Mr. Lynneker," Evans said. "I remember at a big meeting in the Drill Hall last autumn . . ."

But Dickie was not yet satisfied, and when the anecdote had been told, returned to his attack by saying:

"It doesn't seem to you that there's anything dishonest in rubbing all those yarns into these labourers?"

"Oh! my dear boy," his father said. "You don't in the least understand . . ."

Mr. Evans interrupted the reproof by submitting that it was necessary to meet an opponent with his own weapons, and then talked himself on to his feet, into his coat and out to the dog-cart that was waiting at the front door for him, bidding his host good-night amid a final volley of "Mr. Lynnekers."

"Capital fellow," was the Rector's comment. "So earnest."

"And so devoted to the name of Lynneker," put in his wife. "I never heard it mentioned so often before."

The Rector smiled. "A self-made man, of course," he agreed.

The family as a whole found considerable amusement later in various imitations of the ebullient Evans, particularly Adela, who was certainly a clever mimic.

IV

But Dickie's criticism went deeper than ridicule of Evans's mannerisms, although he lacked both practical ex-

perience and theoretical knowledge, and was necessarily too detached and too superficial in his examination. He isolated this single problem that had been presented to him, and tried to solve it by the primitive logical formula that his mathematical bias had suggested. A digest of his enquiry which incidentally touched and immediately recoiled from an application to his father's political opinions, falls into the simplest statements, but he doubted the truth of his conclusions.

His premises were two. The first, that the policy of Mr. Gladstone must be attacked by dishonest methods; the second, that, according to Mr. Evans's admission, this dishonesty was induced by the necessity to fight one's opponents with their own weapons. He could not make a right of these two wrongs.

If a clerk cheated the Bank, the Bank did not retaliate by trying to cheat the clerk. The alternative in that case was a resort to a general principle of integrity administered by the law. In the world of politics there was, apparently, no standard of rectitude to which resort could be made. If the radical John Smith brought in a bill to raise labourers' wages, his political opponents might use any specious falsehood they could invent in order to persuade the labourer that he would be a loser and not a gainer under the proposed act.

That statement which so far as he could judge was incontrovertible, led him to a consideration of why any bill should, *ex hypothesi*, be attacked by the side that was not responsible for its submission to the House. Did one choose a party as one might pick up sides in a cricket-match, and just try for all one was worth to put the other side out?

He rejected that conclusion as altogether too farcical. He believed that Parliament under the King's direction governed the country. Then he remembered the clause in the church catechism and was met by another flat contradiction. Neither his father, nor Mr. Evans, for example, honoured or respected the present Prime Minister, who

certainly came within the definition of one "put in authority under" Queen Victoria.

For a few days he pondered the problem of political dishonesty at odd moments, usually as he was riding between Halton and Medborough, and was inclined to dismiss the whole bother as beyond his understanding. The hand of the prehistoric governess was visible again here. Certain incomprehensible laws had been laid down by her in the forgotten past, and it was, as he had been told many times, arrogant and presumptuous to doubt her proved wisdom.

He might have left his problem there for a time, if it had not been for Bradshaw.

V

Bradshaw had the conservative habit, and Dickie posed him with the question of why he had "picked up" on that side.

It was a wet February afternoon and they were taking their mid-day constitutional by pacing up and down under the deserted arches of the market hall.

"Built that way," Bradshaw explained promptly. "Always been keen on history, as you know."

"But why does that make you so hot against Home Rule?" asked Dickie.

"It's against the traditions," Bradshaw said. "I hate anything that wants to break up the traditions. I'd like to go back to feudalism, with the landowner as a little father to his work-people; and have guilds in the town—everything that makes for brotherhood—Thelema and that sort of thing, you know. Pity you aren't more interested in history, Lynneker."

"Yes," Dickie agreed. "I must have another shot at it."

"You should," Bradshaw said. "Fine stuff." He had formed a considerable liking and admiration for young Lynneker in the course of the past four months.

Dickie was already regarded by the staff of the City & County as a youngster who would make his mark. Mr. Bell had been astonished by his junior clerk's ability to master the general principles of book-keeping and banking, and had advised him to read for the examinations of the Institute of Chartered Accountants as a sure step to ultimate promotion. "Splendid head for figures," had been Mr. Bell's eulogy, made to Cartwright in Bradshaw's hearing. Cartwright was inclined to be a little jealous; but Bradshaw frankly admitted that he had no talent for his work, and that he intended ultimately to strike out on some original line of his own. So no rivalry interfered between him and Dickie, and in some queer way each supplied the other's deficiencies.

"Why I didn't take to history at school," Dickie said, "was because it didn't seem to *do* anything, didn't work, you know."

Bradshaw stopped in his walk and his bright little brown eyes opened in a quaint expression of astonishment. A stranger might have laughed as he would have laughed at seeing his own face in a distorting mirror, but Dickie had come to understand the man behind the mask; he was no more tempted to grin than is a pantomime super talking to his disguised friend.

"Doesn't *do* anything?" Bradshaw exclaimed. "Good Lord, Lynneker!" He shrugged his square, narrow shoulders and attempted explanation with stiff, gesticulating hands. "D'you mean politics, the government of the country doesn't *do* anything?" he asked. "D'you mean things would run themselves if there was no authority for law and order?"

"Oh! no, of course not," returned Dickie, "but where does history come in?"

"Well, you don't suppose civilisation and all the rest of it was made one night when folks were in bed, do you?" asked Bradshaw. "It's all a growth, man, and history is the record of it. I don't say that it hasn't, in my opinion, been growing a bad shape for the last hun-

dred years or so," he added thoughtfully. "What I say is that the French Revolution upset things so as they've never properly got over it; got a bit on the skew-whiff, you know. But we'll have a reaction by and by. Machinery's a curse—read Butler's 'Erewhon'? Oh! you should; Butler's fine—and all this atheism that Darwin started, that's another rotten thing; Butler doesn't believe in Natural Selection; you must read Butler. . . ."

"Here, wait a shake," Dickie interposed, "we haven't time for a public lecture, old chap. I want to ask questions. To begin with, what's Darwin got to do with it? I thought he was a naturalist with some theory about monkeys—awful rot, from all I've heard of it."

Bradshaw's explanation was not of a kind to lighten appreciably the dark places of Dickie's mind. His reading had been characteristically capricious and perfunctory. He had dabbled happily in the shallows of history, giving his imagination play with all the movement and colour of the pageant. The traffic of kings, the wars that were begotten of it, the passing ambitions of various nobles or of the people to take a more authoritative hand in government, all were sympathetically reviewed by him in precisely the same spirit. Each stage of history was to him a detached incident, real as the various chapters of a romantic novel. He clothed the bare story with a wealth of circumstantial detail, for the most part quite inaccurate, and lived in the scene as he lived in the emotions of the theatre.

But if his scholarship was negligible and his plan of reading unscientific, he did, at least, presently inspire Dickie to take a more vital interest in the study of history. Darwin still remained in the obscure background of his mind, labelled as "some naturalist fellow who had a rotten theory about monkeys," and he failed to comprehend the satire of "Erewhon," lent him by Bradshaw; but Dickie began this February to widen his reading, to make the important discovery that there were other subjects besides mathematics that "did" things.

VI

His first attack met with little encouragement. Mr. Lynneker's library was not well-stocked with historical literature. The chief piece was a six-volume history of England "founded on Hume and Smollett," a work that had been published in monthly parts some time before the middle of the century, and one that if it were open to expert censure, had the advantage of being richly illustrated. Beyond this there was a vile edition of Gibbon, condensed into one clumsy octavo; an odd volume of Macaulay's History—the others had been lent and never returned—and an edition of Hallam's "Middle Ages."

Dickie wrestled bravely with this stodgy diet and if he found it little more interesting than the rules of Latin syntax, admitted that the study was opening his eyes to the fact that the British constitution had not, as Bradshaw suggested, miraculously sprung into being while people slept.

But at the back of his mind, some uncertain subconscious suggestion struggled vainly now and again to find expression. Sometimes he would pause in his reading and ruffle his hair, in the vain attempt to understand what lay behind all this mass of particulars concerning the acts of Kings and Queens and Parliaments.

"There's something behind it all I can't get at," he said to Bradshaw. "I feel as if it doesn't quite work, yet, if you know what I mean."

Bradshaw had no idea what he meant, and Dickie, himself, was not at all clear. He found Bradshaw's attempted exposition of the causes of the war between Charles I and his Parliament even less convincing than those advanced in the work "founded on Hume and Smollett."

And then Dickie in a spirit of rash adventure went to a Radical Meeting at the Drill Hall in Medborough.

It was possibly the first time that a Lynneker had ever so demeaned himself, and the Rector frowned upon the

idea when it was mooted. "A waste of time," was his opinion. Nevertheless Dickie went, if not in defiance of parental authority, certainly without parental approval.

He was not impressed by the arguments of the principal speaker, who abused Salisbury and Balfour in much the same spirit as that in which Evans and the Rector had abused Gladstone. The arguments in favour of the Home Rule Bill—it had passed the Commons at that time—seemed to Dickie rather more sensible than those which he had heard against it; but he was outraged by the suggestion that the House, then debating and certainly intending to reject the controversial measure under discussion, ought to be destroyed root and branch.

Dickie had been educated into a profound respect for the House of Lords. His father had thanked God for its existence on more than one recent occasion; and this radical "spouter" who obviously was not a gentleman, was necessarily judged by Lynneker standards as "a rank outsider."

The Rector was still sitting up, in his dressing-gown, when Dickie came in at half-past eleven.

"Well, are you satisfied?" was his half-ironical greeting.

"The chief speaker was a ghastly bounder," Dickie said.

"And you're not converted, eh?"

"Simply don't understand it all," Dickie admitted. "It seems to me that the important thing is to abuse the other side."

Mr. Lynneker made no answer to that. He was occupied in locking, bolting and chaining the front door, and the purport of his son's reply may have been lost upon him.

But one effect remained and grew as an outcome of that attendance at the Drill Hall. One of the less important speakers had made a reference to Thorold Rogers's "Six Centuries of Life and Labour," and the title appealed to Dickie. He succeeded in borrowing a copy of the work from the Medborough Public Library and before he had read three chapters, he found that key to his historical read-

ing which he had not been quite clever enough to discover for himself.

A month or two later he commended the book to Bradshaw who dipped fastidiously and pronounced it "muck."

This introduction of the study of economics diverted Dickie from pure mathematics and marked the first stage of his general education. When he presently returned to a consideration of the calculus, he found that his desire to rival the achievement of J. C. Adams had given place to a greater ambition, to the intense wish to understand something of the inclusive problem. A sight of the immense world had been opened to him, and after a moment's amazed hesitation he set himself doggedly to prepare for its exploration.

He took no one but Bradshaw into his confidence. He had not lost faith in his father's opinion, but he anticipated the advice to return first of all to a study of classic literature, and refused any longer to be dictated to in that matter. He was still under the influence of his reaction, and did not come to a recognition of the real, if subsidiary, place of Greek and Latin in education for more than two years.

Bradshaw was chiefly astounded by Dickie's statement that he meant to learn French and German.

"All right for a foreign correspondent's job," was Bradshaw's utilitarian criticism, and he shook his head over the explanation that French and German, and more particularly the latter, were only pathways to historical and economic material.

"It's beyond me, Lynneker, old boy," he said. "I'm a born what-you-call-it—not electric; something like that—just a dabbler. You'll be Chancellor of the Exchequer one day, safe as eggs. I haven't got enough gum in my constitution; can't stick to anything, except my own bits of history, for more than a fortnight. Do everything a bit in

about ten minutes and can't get any further. My new bit's learning the piano. I could always vamp a bit and play tunes by ear, but I'm having regular lessons, now." He paused a moment and then went on, "Miss Young's teaching me. I expect you know her by sight. She and her mother live in the Dogsthorpe Road; ladies, of course, rather hard up."

But Dickie did not know Miss Young by sight, and being rather intent on his own plan of work, failed to offer Bradshaw the encouragement he was plainly seeking.

"Only struck me," Bradshaw said, "that if you were going to learn French,—she teaches that, too, I know...."

"My mother speaks French very well," Dickie said. "I can get accent from her, if necessary—but I shan't bother about that, yet. I want to be able to read French and German, not to speak them."

"You're a wonder," Bradshaw admitted with a sigh.

Dickie mumbled some advice about "not being a silly ass."

VII

EDWARD

I

DICKIE had been at the Bank nearly twelve months, when Edward fell in love with Gertrude Leake.

He had been in love before; once he had been almost engaged to a widow, ten years his senior, and might have drifted into marriage with her if she had not let her house in Medborough that spring and gone to Italy. By the time she returned he had discovered that much as he admired her, she was not to be the great inspiration of his life, and Mrs. Blackwell had made no effort to recall him. She had liked him well enough, but had feared the criticism of the Precincts.

But this time, as Edward insisted, it was "absolutely final."

He came into the City & County just before four o'clock one Wednesday afternoon in August and asked for Dickie who explained that he could not possibly get away for at least half an hour, as Cartwright was away on his holidays and there was much necessary work to be done after the Bank was closed to the Public.

"All right," Edward said mildly. "I'll go to Hopkinson's; will you come on there? I thought we might walk home together."

"All serene," agreed Dickie, and wondered why his elder brother was so eager for his company.

The reason did not appear while they were having tea at the Broad Street confectioner's, which only offered the

hospitality of three little round-topped marble tables in the front shop and was no place for the display of emotions.

Edward was unusually polite and considerate, and although he had moments of intense abstraction, was very ready to talk of the Medborough tennis tourney in which he had been playing for the last two days.

"When do they finish it?" asked Dickie after he had listened to a realistic account of how Edward and his partner were knocked out in the semi-final.

"Oh! they'll finish it this evening," Edward said.

"You don't care who wins particularly, I suppose?"

"I'm rather keen on young Hudson and his sister," Edward said. "It's between them and the Wetheralls, the draper people in Priestgate, you know. I rather bar that chap; he puts on such awful side."

"Why didn't you stay and see it out?" asked Dickie by way of keeping the conversation going.

Edward appeared pleasantly confused, and glanced across at his brother with a look that said: "Haven't you the least idea how things are?" Then he carefully picked up a crumb of cake and dropped it into his tea-cup. "Didn't seem worth while," he remarked in a tone that implied he was deliberately keeping some important secret in reserve and wished the enquiry to be pressed later.

He carefully led up to the same point when they were out of the town, but Dickie was obtuse and they had passed Thrapley and were in the stretch of road that cuts through the Grinling woods before Edward could make his confession. He might have delayed it even longer if the romance of his surroundings had not worked upon him and made silence impossible—any irrelevant conversation was silence to Edward that afternoon.

"Let's have a rest," he suggested. "I'm a bit fagged; playing tennis all day. Have a cigarette?"

Dickie was not a smoker, but he accepted the cigarette. He had a vague idea of what Edward was going to confide in him and was at once bored and embarrassed by the prospect.

Edward was leaning over the gate of the private grass-road through the wood, staring up the dark tunnel of the avenue to the distant brilliance of a sunlit clearing. In his flannels he bore no mark of the parson; and his neat dark moustache failed to disguise him. Dickie could only see him as an elder brother, but he was just a rather sentimental, flattered schoolboy.

II

"I suppose you can't guess," he said, after a long pause. "You haven't made it up with Mrs. Blackwell?" hazarded Dickie.

"Good Lord, no!" The contempt of the denial was mingled with irritation at Dickie's stupidity. "There never was anything in that," he explained, frowning. "It was never in the least serious."

"Sorry; I didn't know," apologised Dickie.

"Haven't you any idea?"

Dickie had no ideas on that subject. He wanted to get home. He had wasted nearly two hours already.

"I should have thought it was pretty obvious," Edward confessed modestly. "I should have thought everybody would have seen how things were."

"Are you engaged?" asked Dickie.

"Practically. She was my partner in the tournament, you know, and I had lunch at the Vicarage. And, afterwards, we were alone in the drawing-room for about two minutes. It was then . . ."

"Did you propose to her?" Dickie's question was asked in desperation. He knew, now, the name of this incarnation of his brother's ideal. She was the eldest daughter of the Vicar of Medborough. Dickie had seen her once or twice, and remembered her as a buxom, high-complexioned, fair young woman, who got very hot and dishevelled when she played tennis. It was certainly not a type he admired, and in the front of his thoughts was an epithet he had

heard from Bradshaw. Bradshaw was undoubtedly coarse at times, and his reference to his Vicar's daughter as "blowsy Gertie," was in odious taste, but the epithet had, at the moment, seemed horribly apt.

Edward shook his head impatiently as if anything so gross and commonplace as a proposal was hopelessly out of the picture.

"You said you were 'practically' engaged," Dickie said.

"I—I held her hand for about two seconds," Edward confessed intrepidly; "and afterwards, on the courts, she said something about my going to St. Peter's as her father's curate after I've taken my priest's orders in the autumn."

"That would be rather decent," commented Dickie.

"I should see her every day," mused Edward.

Dickie had not considered that aspect of his brother's possible preferment, and tried to include it by saying: "It would be an awful score for you in every way."

"It would, wouldn't it?" Edward said.

"Rather," Dickie assured him. "I say, oughtn't we to be getting on?"

"Where's the hurry? It's only just six," Edward protested. "I don't feel quite in the mood for going home, yet. I want to think about it all. It has been so sudden, in a way. I've been very keen, of course, for the last six weeks; ever since we played two sets together at Allerton at the Buckley's garden party. But I never guessed that she cared till to-day."

"Shall you tell them at home?"

"Great Scott, *no*. Not yet, anyway. I might tell the mater, perhaps. No one else."

"I suppose there's no chance of Mr. Leake objecting?"

"I haven't thought about it."

"When do you expect to see her again?"

"To-morrow, I hope. She goes to the Cathedral pretty often in the afternoon, and she'll be there to-morrow, I know, because the St. Peter's organist is going to take the service, and she told me she wanted to hear him in the Cathedral."

"Are you going to ask her to marry you, then?"

Edward frowned. "You're dreadfully gauche, Dickie," he said.

"Why? What was wrong with that?" Dickie asked.

Edward put on what his younger brother called his "confounded supercilious look."

"You're so disgustingly business-like," he said. "Perhaps you would like me to ask her for a contract, and make it a condition that I should have the curacy. You don't seem to have a grain of poetry in your composition."

"Dare say not," replied Dickie carelessly. "Shall we be getting on?" He thought it was rather rough on him that after wasting three blessed hours, more or less, just to listen to this meander about that fat Leake girl, he should be hauled over the coals for not being sentimental about it.

Dickie was rapidly coming to a criticism of the methods of his family. "They fiddled about so much," was the phrase that expressed the slight irritation of his mind.

III

His criticism was accentuated by his observation of Edward's "absolutely final" love affair.

A month after that conversation in the Grinling wood, any definite engagement seemed as far away as ever. Mrs. Lynneker had been taken into her son's confidence, and shared with Dickie the honour of being the recipient of various confessions of hope and despair.

The daring of Edward's advance in the Vicarage drawing-room had been followed by a reaction. "She"—Edward used no other description—had been, he thought, a little cool when he met her after the Cathedral service. He had boldly made a reference to the possibility of his becoming her father's curate, and had been rather snubbed.

"We're not certain, yet, whether Mr. Grace is leaving," she had said.

Edward was sure of her exact words, and had asked his

mother's opinion, and Dickie's, on the precise significance of that statement.

"It seemed to me, I don't know, that her tone was a little cold," Edward explained.

Then something very like a quarrel followed.

She did not turn up at the Little Milton garden party, and Edward could only suppose that it was because she wanted to avoid meeting him.

Dickie had a trying time during the next six days. Edward took him out for "a pipe" on the back lawn after supper, and seriously upset his work. His excuses were met by a pleading expression, and the assurance that he need only come for ten minutes; and his irritation was not acute enough to prompt a flat refusal.

Edward was considering the idea of going to Central Africa as a missionary at that time. He had even aired the suggestion before the whole family, none of whom except Adela had openly poured contempt on the proposal.

Mr. Lynneker had always been an ardent worker in the cause of the Church Missionary Society, and he felt that if his dear son had had "a call," it must be taken with a great seriousness. He added an ambiguously worded clause to family prayers on the evening after the announcement was made, and Edward wore a very earnest, white-faced expression all the next day.

Dickie, with the best intentions, urged his brother to put his fate to the test with "her," and was met with the reply: "I know it's hopeless. She's simply taking the kindest way of showing me that she wasn't serious, when 'that' happened."

He spoke of the drawing-room incident as if it were the outstanding experience of his life. And, indeed, in all his love affairs, Edward had never reached the intimacy of a kiss. . . .

Dickie's impatience increased rapidly during the six days of that misunderstanding.

IV

The new phase was begun by a letter from Mr. Leake. He wrote to Mr. Lynneker: ". . . that splendid fellow Grace has finally decided to work as a missionary in China, and I have been wondering whether your son, Edward, would care to come to me as junior curate, as soon as he has taken his priest's orders. . . .?"

Dickie was late at the Bank that morning, for the first time. Edward insisted on walking with him as far as the Grinling wood.

"It must mean something," was the essence of Edward's argument. "Surely, if she never meant to speak to me again" (he had reached that stage by *a priori* methods), "she would have done something to prevent the Vicar from writing to the pater."

Dickie, uncomfortably conscious of the fact that he had less than twelve minutes for the remaining three miles, attempted to be shatteringly conclusive.

"Rather," he agreed. "Of course, she would. I always told you you were being depressed about nothing. The mater told you that she was probably ever so much shyer than you are yourself. I say I must go."

"Oh! wait half a shake," Edward implored him, and laid a hand on his brother's sleeve.

"I shall have to be very careful not to offend her again," Edward explained and began to outline a tremulous plan of campaign, the chief attacking movement of which was to be a patient, beseeching silence.

"Oh! I shouldn't," Dickie interrupted him. "Why not be a little brave for a change and ask her right out?"

"You've simply no idea of tact or decency," replied the outraged Edward. "That would simply put her off altogether. You don't in the least understand."

"Perhaps not," Dickie agreed. "Why you bother to tell me about it I don't know." It was half-past nine by then, and his patience was at last evaporated.

"Well, you needn't be a cad, anyway," Edward returned, blushing with indignation.

"I suppose it's the effect of working in a Bank," Dickie said as he threw his leg over the saddle of his bicycle.

"I should have thought that you might still have tried to be a gentleman," was the reproof that followed him.

But Edward was willing to reinstate Dickie that evening, even to suggest some kind of apology for the insult that Dickie had forgotten. Edward's amende was another version of Latimer's visit to the stable-yard, after he had been so disgracefully licked by his younger brother. The Lynnekers might quarrel, but they could not bear the fret of sustaining unfriendly relations; sooner than endure that, they preferred graciously to admit the fault.

Edward had not been into Medborough that day but he was going to the Vicarage to tea the next afternoon, and despite Dickie's "caddish" remarks of the morning, he was evidently expected to sympathise with the re-elaboration of the policy of *laissez faire*. Presumably Dickie's morning comments had been due to bad temper, and were to be excused on the ground that he had to mix with some "rather rotten people" at the Bank.

Dickie displayed great patience, but he sincerely hoped that the whole affair would soon be settled one way or the other.

v

The serene, almost holy elation of Edward's face when he returned from Medborough the next day would have been sufficient acknowledgement of the fact that he was at last "engaged"; even if the affair had not been solemnly registered in the family annals. This was something to be taken seriously, and Mrs. Lynneker, alone, ventured a little gentle chaff over the supper table. Edward frowned sedately, with an air that tolerantly deprecated his mother's humour.

Eleanor apparently considered marriage subject for

prayer and meditation; Adela, although she did not risk a leading question, continually looked at Edward with a new curiosity, as if she had been surprised by some aspect of him hitherto unsuspected. She may have been trying to see him with the eyes of Miss Leake.

Dickie fully expected to be haled out for a pipe on the lawn after supper, and on this occasion he was not unwilling. He had followed the affair through its infinitely tentative stages, and he was curious to hear how the last, enormous chasm had been bridged.

But when they all rose from the table, Edward exhibited no particular desire to be alone with his younger brother, and it was actually Dickie who said:

"Coming out for a breather?"

"Might as well," Edward replied without enthusiasm.

And when they were outside in the cool air of the gusty September night, he began to talk of the weather.

"Blowing up for rain," he remarked. "I suppose the summer's over. Always depresses me rather when the autumn begins in earnest."

Dickie mumbled an agreement, and then went on, "How did you bring it off?"

"It wasn't a question of 'bringing it off' in any sense," Edward returned irritably. For a man who had won his long-delayed heart's desire a few hours before, he was singularly touchy, Dickie thought.

"I'm sorry," he apologised.

For a few moments they paced the lawn without speaking and then Edward said:

"It isn't a thing one can talk about, you see. Before . . . before anything had happened, it was quite different. Now it's—it's sacred, if you can understand me?"

"I understand," Dickie said. "Shall we go in? It's a bit chilly to-night."

"You're not offended, old chap?" Edward asked, with a sudden burst of affection.

"Oh, no! rather not." Dickie understood that he was relieved for the future from the duties of a confidant, and

was willing enough to buy himself out at the price of an unsatisfied curiosity; but his thoughts returned now and again to the problem of how Edward had found the will or the courage to commit himself to an open declaration.

VI

A study of Miss Leake's personality, when she came over to Halton a fortnight later, helped to suggest the probabilities of that unreported scene in Medborough vicarage.

Among looser social influences Miss Leake might have developed into an easy-mannered, rather loud, warm-hearted young woman who would have been considered "bad form" in the Precincts. Her clerical circumstances had curbed the natural expression of her temperament, and a certain abundance of vitality in her found an outlet in playing games with remarkable vigour. She was the only lady tennis-player in the Medborough neighbourhood who served overhand.

Dickie liked her. He found her a "jolly" girl on nearer acquaintance. If he had pressed his examination a little further, he might have discovered that it was her general interest in life that appealed to him. He walked with her round the garden after tea, and showed her his make-shift carpenter's shop in the stables; and they talked without embarrassment.

She was the first person in Dickie's home circle who had observed the peculiarities of Bradshaw's appearance.

"That dear, funny-looking man in the Bank," she called him, and asked, "What is he like, close to? Is he as odd in his ways as he is to look at?"

"Quite," Dickie said. "He's a born funny man, you know. Makes you yell with laughter when he lays himself out."

"He ought to go on the stage," Miss Leake said, and her hackneyed suggestion had some warmth of interest that saved it from banality.

"He's rather queer about that," Dickie told her. "Rather sensitive about being made fun of, I think."

"Poor dear," commented Miss Leake, as if she would be glad to stand between Bradshaw and the unsympathetic world who laughed at him.

It appeared that she had a second Christian name and was to be known as Helen in the family;—Edward preferred it.

"I think Gertie suits me better," she told Dickie. "Helen sounds dark and statuesque, but I don't care, really."

"I prefer 'Helen,' too," Dickie said, and wondered whether his future sister-in-law would change her attitude towards Bradshaw, if she heard of his epithet for her.

"I suppose that's because you're a Lynneker," she said. Dickie did not understand that reason.

"Always a bit on the high horse," she explained.

"Are you making some joke about Troy?" he asked.

She laughed. "Goodness, no," she said. "I leave classical jokes to father. I meant that you are all just a wee bit supercilious, aren't you?"

"Are we?" asked Dickie. "I didn't know. I'm dead certain I'm not."

"Perhaps *you* aren't," she said. "But you do all of you rather keep your noses in the air. And you aren't the only people who come from Staffordshire, you know."

"Funny! It's never struck me," Dickie admitted. "I always thought that family history tosh, myself. But I say, Helen, do you mean that Edward and Latimer and Eleanor and Adela put on side?"

"Oh! it isn't as bad as that," she assured him. "It's just a way you have. I shall soon chaff Edward out of it."

The statement of that intention seemed in some way incongruous to Dickie; and later, when he saw the engaged couple together, he wondered if the marriage would be a success. He knew that Edward would not like being "chaffed out" of his little peculiarities. He had always been sensitive about being chaffed and since he had taken deacon's orders appeared to think that he was above criti-

cism. And Helen displayed an effect of managing him that even then Edward resented with a feebly-deprecating frown.

Dickie decided in his own mind that Miss Leake had, also, "managed" that proposal.

VII

If she had, Edward never confessed the fact. Indeed, he had quite abandoned confessions to either Dickie or his mother.

Mrs. Lynneker had moments of uneasiness.

"Do you think Edward is really in love with Helen?" she asked Dickie one evening, nearly a year after her eldest son's engagement.

"I don't know," Dickie said. "He never confides in me."

The engaged couple had been at the Rectory that afternoon and Helen's tendency to management had been more pronounced. Once Edward had fretfully objected to one of her commands and had been laughingly ruled into a submission that had an air of sullenness.

"He's so like your father in some things," Mrs. Lynneker said.

"She bosses him rather, doesn't she?" returned Dickie.

"She's nice; I like her," his mother went on reflectively.

"But I'm not sure that she understands Edward."

She paused on that, dimly conscious, perhaps, that she, too, had not understood when she had married Edward's father nearly thirty years before. The Lynnekers were a queer family; their men never seemed to make happy marriages. And she had an intuition that Edward, also, would have reserves from his wife; that those two would carry on the tradition and live separate lives under one roof. Helen would not respect his weaknesses, and the Lynnekers were proud of their weaknesses; they wanted not comradeship, but a slavish, worshipping devotion.

"I feel as if I want to kick him, myself, sometimes," Dickie commented.

"Dick!" expostulated his mother.

"There's something so weak-kneed about him," Dickie explained. "I *should* like to see him absolutely rude to some one, for a change. It's all this slackness of trying always to please the people you're with, that annoys me. Latimer's just the same. Every one says they've got such nice manners. I don't know, I'm rather glad I haven't."

"You're so brave," Mrs. Lynneker said, taking her son's arm. "I think you must get it from my father. He never cared what he said to people."

"It isn't only that, you know," Dickie went on. "It's that Edward and Latimer never *do* anything. I can't explain it exactly, but you know what I mean, don't you?"

"I think I do," his mother said, and pressed his arm affectionately. "I know *some one* who's going to *do* something," she added.

"I'll have a try, anyhow," Dickie admitted. "But it is true, mater, isn't it, about their confounded manners. Doesn't it annoy you, too, sometimes?"

She was a little uncertain on that point, despite the fact that neither Edward nor Latimer had been as tender to her as Dickie. But in her heart she was a little afraid of her youngest son; he was so frank and so strong. And there was a confession she knew must presently be made to him, for she dared not tell his father, and the others were not in a position to help her.

Dickie had always been very gentle with her, but she dreaded the making of that confession.

VIII

MRS. LYNNEKER

I

MRS. LYNNEKER suffered various weaknesses fostered by her early Victorian education. She had a quick, clever mind; she could quote Shakespeare with relevance, not by the suggestion of the prominent word, and she could appreciate and savour the quality of his phrase; she could be witty in the manner of her period; several good things were credited to her; she was a capable pianist. But after nearly thirty years of life in a country rectory, years that had narrowed and hardened her in many ways, she was still the victim of certain nervous inabilities encouraged by her training.

She could not endure to ride behind a horse that displayed the least tendency to shy; she was terrified by the sight of a gun; she hid herself in a cupboard at the first warnings of a coming thunderstorm. Without doubt she was by nature a timid woman, and during all her early life—she had not married until she was twenty-nine and hopelessly passé by Victorian standards—all her weaknesses had been sedulously encouraged. They had been regarded in those days as the marks of proper feminine gentility. If she had not been stiffened by the comparative robustness of life in a parsonage, and by the bearing of five children, she might have developed the affectations and vapours of the typical spinster of that time.

She had been saved from those simpering graces and shallow airs by the urgency of her life, but the stamp of her early lessons in conduct had left a mark on her char-

acter. She was a moral coward. It seemed as if those cultivated timidities had affected her mind and will.

II

And, indeed, the confession she had now to face might have daunted a less fearful woman. No euphemisms or excuses could palliate the horrid fact that Mrs. Lynneker had been guilty of a crime that would have landed any of her husband's parishioners in the police court. The Rector had made no overstatement when he had confided to his sons that their mother had "no idea of the value of money."

Her father had lived in good style during his life-time. He had had a big house in Bloomsbury, had kept a black servant, and moved in the best rank of a society that, if its most distinguished members rose no higher than City knights, could boast a greater wealth than the aristocrats of Belgravia. But when he died two years after his youngest daughter's marriage to the Rector of Halton, the old merchant had made no further provision for her than a charge on his business of £60 a year. The business itself had gone to his two sons, both of them married and with large families, and they complained that the China tea trade, as represented by the firm of Williams & Son, had greatly depreciated. Mrs. Lynneker knew that she could expect no financial assistance from her brothers.

Her sixty pounds a year should have sufficed for her needs, but she was generous to her children, liked putting her name down for subscriptions, and when she went into Medborough, as she did at least once a week, she invariably spent more than she had intended—for the most part on trivialities that brought her no kind of satisfaction when the delightful act of purchasing was accomplished. Quite early in her married life she had begun to anticipate her half-yearly dividend, but by such shifts as postponing the payment of bills and neglecting her wardrobe, she had contrived on most occasions to avoid the awful ordeal of

appealing to her husband for money. Only three times during their married life had she dared to face the making of that request.

The Rector certainly had not made the way easy for her, and she blamed him in her heart for driving her to a less legitimate resort, to the borrowing of money from the "Coal Club."

She managed the Coal Club without interference from any examining authority. The members paid her a shilling every month throughout the year, and their contributions, reinforced by charitable subscriptions, procured them a whole ton of coal at Christmas. Towards the fall of the year Mrs. Lynneker would have charge of between twenty and thirty pounds, money that she kept in cash in a tin box in a drawer of her wardrobe.

And little by little she had come to regard this horde as a bank upon which she might draw to anticipate her September dividend—she always received the half-yearly allowance from her brothers on the 25th of March and the 29th of September—until she discovered on one terrible occasion that if she were to pay a bill that had been running for over three years and had become unpleasantly pressing, she would not have enough left to make good her deficit of club money, to say nothing of fulfilling her promises for various subscriptions and the inconvenience of being left without a single penny until the following March.

She had faced her husband, then, for the third time with the firm intention of making a full confession. But that was the year before Dickie left Oakstone, and after summoning up her courage to beg the interview, her spirit had suddenly failed her and she had ended by asking for ten pounds. It was not a third of what she required, but it seemed an enormous sum when it was reluctantly stated in the Rector's study; and her husband's forbearing, damning silence made her thankful at the moment that she had not dared to be decently truthful.

It was after this ineffectual interview that she fell into the clutches of the "Medborough Loan Co."

The methods of that institution were the familiar methods of its type. The principal never appeared, or if he did was so well disguised by the assumption of being his own clerk that the innocent borrower never suspected his identity. The nominal rate of interest charged was ten per cent., but introduced into the printed form of agreement between the "loan agent" and the borrower, were various ingenuities that considerably augmented that modest charge for the use of the capital advanced. Chief among these tricks was the principle of making the sum lent repayable in three or five years by annual instalments, with the proviso that if any instalment was not repaid within seven days of the due date, the amount of it should be debited as a new loan, bearing the same rate of interest. The punctual borrower who was not too hard pressed, might escape from the clutches of the Medborough Loan Company without further penalty than the payment of about twenty-five per cent. for his loan; but Mrs. Lynneker and her kind, by whose custom the Loan Company existed, rolled ever deeper and deeper into debt.

III

She had suffered many qualms before she had dared to enter those inconspicuous offices in Cross Street; but she had finally burnt her boats in that interview with her husband, and of the many ignominies with which she was faced, this seemed to incur the least open disgrace. Nevertheless she realised that her adventure was only one degree less shameful than a visit to the pawnbroker's.

The path of the borrower was made easier by the fact that the Loan Company's offices were sandwiched vertically between a ground floor coal merchant and a photographer's studio. Unless the victim was actually caught knocking at the prescribed door, he was safe from the criticism of the casual passer-by. Mrs. Lynneker grasped the advantages of the strategical position, but she hesitated painfully before

she entered the building. Even when she was actually facing the generous invitation to "knock and enter," she nearly turned back.

The well-dressed young man who greeted her with an appraising stare and a non-committal "good afternoon," further increased her nervousness by his air of aloofness. She was hot and flustered; her veil was sticking to her face, and no scrap of dignity remained to her. "Are you the Loan Company?" she asked desperately, conscious that her enquiry was not happily phrased.

"These are the offices of the Medborough Loan Company," replied the smart young man coldly, and added: "Are you desirous of effecting a loan?"

"A small loan," Mrs. Lynneker said. She had a sense that smallness in this direction must be a guarantee of her good faith. She was prepared at this eleventh hour to halve the minimum amount she required and trust to Providence for the remainder.

The unconcerned young clerk in charge conducted her to an inner room before he enquired the extent of the loan she required. He had judged her to be the wife of a small farmer and was not inclined to be gracious. He even pursed his lips at the mention of £10.

"On what security?" he asked.

Mrs. Lynneker blushed. "In your advertisement . . ." she began.

"In some cases we are willing to advance money without security," was the reserved answer. "Are you married? Well, would your husband be willing to guarantee the amount?"

Mrs. Lynneker blushed still deeper and set her lips. She felt horribly degraded, but she was afraid to retreat now.

"I would sooner not ask him," she said.

The clerk sighed and took down a printed form.

"Will you fill this up?" he demanded.

Mrs. Lynneker glanced down a list of questions that searched her private life to its depths. She had nearly reached that extremity of the meek, when submission turns

unexpectedly to aggression. She felt that she could face any suspicion of the well-dressed clerk sooner than fill in that paper. Unhappily for her he saved the situation by suggesting that she might give him her name.

She admitted to "Lynneker."

The clerk's change of manner was altogether too sudden. He convicted himself of a gross failure in tact; but his unhappy victim was too relieved to draw uncomplimentary inferences just then. Indeed, the thought of going away empty-handed opened a prospect she dared not contemplate.

The representative of the M. L. C. was trying to retrieve his mistake by explanation of his fiduciary cares, but the only item of his eloquent appeal that touched Mrs. Lynneker came at the end of his speech. "Will ten pounds really be enough, Madam?" he asked. "I ought to explain that one year's interest is payable in advance, and there will be charges of a guinea in connection with the agreement, including the stamp."

She knew very well that a net ten pounds would represent no more than half her liability, and with the partial return of her self-respect, she was tempted to plunge. The clerk's new manner was reassuring and his explanation of the M. L. C. methods presented them as peculiarly framed to meet her own needs.

She resisted weakly until he reached her limit, but at thirty pounds she stopped him with determination. She had some idea at that time of repaying the whole sum when she received her next half-yearly allowance, and the mention of that precise sum of £30 shocked her into a realisation that she was exceeding her capacity.

She experienced but the faintest twinge of conscience as she signed the agreement; and when she was safely back in Cross Street carrying £25.19.0 in cash, her last doubt was drowned in elation at the knowledge that she was, at last, saved from the immediate worry that had so terribly oppressed her during the past few months. And her future obligations were in effect provided for by the fervour of her determination to set aside £15 of her March allowance

for the purposes of liquidation. In a year, she thought hopefully, she would be "straight" again, and in future . . .

What chiefly betrayed her was the optimism of her estimates. The six pounds or so of ready money that she had counted upon to carry her on to March, was gone before the New Year. In calculating her weekly expenses she had overlooked, among other items, Christmas presents for her own children and for that long tale of nephews and nieces, the children of her two brothers at Highgate. She had always sent them *something*, she argued; it would look so mean not to send them *anything*. And then she was tempted into spending more money upon them than usual.

Another drain upon her resources that had not been entered in her calculation was provided by the house-accounts. She paid in cash for various items of household expenditure, advancing the money, herself, against her husband's inclusive cheque at the end of the month. And when she came to make up her books and found that the total, as always, exceeded her anticipation, she was tempted to omit any record of her own cash payment, sooner than increase the total to that point at which the Rector would be moved to proclaim that he didn't know how much longer this sort of thing could go on.

Finally, when Dickie went into the Bank and there seemed to be a prospect of comparative financial security, she had a brief period of quite unjustifiable reaction during which she bought clothes for herself and Adela.

By February she was at the Club cash-box again, and that autumn her indebtedness to the Medborough Loan Company was increased by six pounds. She had only succeeded in saving two pounds towards her first re-payment instalment, and the other eight were officially entered as a "further loan."

It is true that she wondered vaguely why it was that she received that eight pounds neither in cash nor credit, but the intricacies of the smart young man's explanation of what he called a "specific term" loan convinced her that the

subtleties of high finance were beyond her understanding.

Two years later her debt to the M. L. C. was over fifty pounds, and she had decided that she could no longer bear the strain of the anxiety. She dared not tell her husband, but, given a favourable opportunity, she might tell Dickie. He was so practical.

IV

She would have preferred to wait until the perfectly suitable moment presented itself, but early in October, a few days before her next payment became due, she reached the limit of her endurance. She understood clearly enough, now, that this "snowball" system of borrowing could not go on indefinitely; and on that Sunday evening she set her lips very firmly, made an excuse to the Rector for missing evensong, and asked Dickie to stay at home with her.

"I've got a confession to make," she told him, and was relieved to be so far committed by the statement that retreat was impossible.

If it had not been Sunday evening she would have had some fancy work for her hands to play with while she made confession to her youngest son; but any work being out of place, she fiddled with the fringe of the antimacassar. She sat at one end of the sofa, and Dickie at the other, formally separated by the small, oval back of the empty middle seat—that Victorian piece of furniture seemed designed to accommodate two parents and their child, all three respectably upright and prim. No one could have offended propriety by reclining on such a frigid, angular couch.

Mrs. Lynneker's opening was framed to anticipate a certain aspect of Dickie's criticism. Fear of censure was her dominant emotion; but she was suppliant to the little boy she had nursed and taught because she desperately hoped to retain something of his respect.

"I've got myself into a horrible muddle, dear; and I

want your advice as a business man," she began hopefully and with a touch of playfulness, "the only business man of the family."

Dickie nodded and frowned slightly. For one moment he looked unfortunately like his father, and his mother experienced a chill of discouragement. It came to her with alarming clearness now that the need to put her confession into words was inevitable, how little excuse she had for her cowardice, or, at least, how little excuse she would be able to plead, if her last confidant were to take up the attitude she so well knew and dreaded.

"Do try to understand, dear," she pleaded in a failing voice, and then she grasped at some fiction of maternal dignity and added, "You've no right to judge me until you've heard the truth."

"I'm not," returned Dickie, with the specious air of one advising a criminal that he would receive fair trial.

Mrs. Lynneker wondered if, after all, she could go through with this confession. It was not a "fair trial" she wanted—she had already pleaded guilty—but sympathy and encouragement.

"Oh! Dick, do try to understand my position," she said.

She knew that she was prejudicing her case by these ominous preliminaries, but she felt that she could not state the horrible, repulsive facts in cold blood. The nearer she came to the framing of any specific statement, the more criminally weak her own conduct appeared to her. And yet, half an hour earlier she had reached the pitch of believing herself abundantly justified. The insuperable difficulty that stood between her and the approach to Dickie's sympathy was the impossibility of laying the blame upon his father's shoulders.

She made a hopeless attempt by beginning again with, "You know how difficult it is to talk to your father about money. . . ." and then the realisation of her own misery overcame her. She made a final effort to maintain the respect due to a woman of fifty-seven and the mother of five grown children, but even as she drew herself up with

the flickering intention of preserving her dignity, she suddenly and incontinently burst into tears.

And even then she sought to save her prestige. She tried to escape; and when Dickie stopped her in the middle of the room with a strong, sympathetic hand on her arm, she made a petulant effort to repulse him.

"It's no use—you can't any of you understand," she blurted out girlishly, relieving her heart of the admission that for twenty-five years she had been alone.

"I say, mater, I'm fearfully sorry. I suppose I *didn't* understand, but I'll try if you'll give me a chance," Dickie said. He was a little overwhelmed and embarrassed; the whole scene had such an absurd likeness to a lovers' quarrel; but he was hers, now; completely won by the appeal to his strength.

And she knew so well when that tender support was at last offered to her after twenty-five years' loneliness, that she happily forgot the dignity due to her age and pathetically clung to him.

"Oh! Dickie, you don't know what tortures I've suffered," she sobbed. "I wouldn't let your father know for worlds."

"That'll be all right, mater," he said. "Come along and tell me about it."

It seemed impossible for those two to achieve a sympathetic understanding, unless for this one evening they made some common cause against the man who was at that moment on his knees before the Almighty, and, in his own manner, not less conscious of loneliness than his wife.

V

Yet, after all, she did not give Dickie her full confidence.

All her ignominious dealings with the Loan Company were set out. Once the admission of her first weakness was made, the rest followed as a matter of course. But she could not bring herself to confess her misuse of the Club money. She slurred over her reasons for the first borrow-

ing—she had anticipated her allowance. Wetherall had pressed her for payment, she said; and Dickie made further explanations unnecessary by his comment that young Wetherall had been in rather a tight corner three years ago, and had collected all the accounts he could.

Dickie was not curious as to the immediate cause of his mother's first injudicious visit to Cross Street. He wanted to come as quickly as might be to figures; to understand precisely what could be done to relieve her from the burden of debt.

"Well, what's the total now, mater?" he asked, interrupting her puzzled account of how the loan seemed to grow with every repayment.

"Nearly forty pounds, I think," she told him, and his astounded whistle checked her impulse to be quite truthful and admit the full amount as an afterthought. "At least I think so," she added.

"Have you got any account of it?" was his next question, and she got up and produced a little notebook from a drawer of her secretaire.

She had meant to hide her fuddled record from him, but he came up to her end of the sofa and looked over her shoulder.

"You mustn't flurry me, dear," she said a little impatiently.

Dickie smiled quietly. "It's all right, mater; don't you worry any more," he said. "But you must give me all the particulars. I know it's a nuisance, but I must have some sort of a case when I go to see this fellow to-morrow."

"Are you going to see him?" she asked, a little shocked and frightened.

"Of course. I must."

She knew that it was useless for her to combat that quiet statement of his intention, and she preferred that he should have the truth from her rather than from the detestable young man in Cross Street.

"I began by borrowing thirty pound," she said. (Despite all Edward's well-intentioned efforts to correct her, she

occasionally lapsed into the habits of speech she had learned from her father.)

"Well," prompted Dickie.

She understood her own figures and she could infer the dates. Little by little the dreadful climax was reached and the total of £51.15.0 declared.

Dickie hardly seemed to notice it.

"But good heavens," was his comment, "you don't mean to say you've always paid the interest up to date?"

"Oh, yes, always," she assured him with a new hopefulness.

"But then how has the amount increased?" he asked.

"I never could quite make out why it did," she said with a perplexed sigh. "The man did explain it to me. I think it was something to do with the thirty pound only being borrowed for three years."

"And you paid the interest in advance?"

"Yes, always."

"I suppose you realise that it's a most infernal swindle," Dickie said.

"Do you mean that I might get out of paying it?" she asked.

Dickie shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, yet," he admitted. "What documents have you got? Receipts and things?"

"He never gave me a receipt," she said. "I was very stupid about it all, I know; but I dreaded going to that place and I was so afraid of a fuss."

Dickie ruffled his hair. He saw very clearly that his mother was typical of the average borrower from the Medborough Loan Company. They were all afraid of a fuss, and the company thrived on the use it made of that knowledge.

"I can't do anything till I've seen the chap," he said.

For a moment or two they sat in silence and then Mrs. Lynneker held up her hand.

"Listen!" she said.

From the church, less than three hundred yards away, came the sound of a deep, musical rumble, above which

they could intermittently distinguish the faint lilt of a tune.

"Can you hear?" Mrs. Lynneker asked.

"'Lead Kindly Light,' I think," was Dickie's judgment. His mother's look of anxiety returned.

"Yes," she agreed. "It's the hymn after the sermon. They'll be out in a minute or two."

"Well, look here, mater, there's no earthly need for you to worry any more," Dickie assured her. "You leave it absolutely to me. I'll see this swindling beggar to-morrow; and even if I can't do anything with him, I'll get the money somehow."

She put out her hands to him.

"You've no idea of the weight you've taken off my mind, dear," she said.

Dickie kissed her.

"You ought to have told me before," was his only reproach.

She made no answer to that. She would have liked, even now, to make final confession; to tell him that she had hidden something from him. It seemed that that one reservation was still interposed between her and the understanding and sympathy which were so suddenly possible. And yet, she dared not tell him the story of the Coal Club money; not because that speculation seemed to her a serious sin, but because she knew intuitively that Dickie would be shocked. Her mind worked on that, without making further discovery. She covered her fault and believed that her own reservation was the ultimate barrier between her and her son. If she had gone a little deeper she would have understood that it was the fundamental difference between their modes of thought.

She hesitated another moment before she ventured to say timorously, with a hint of apology, "I should have liked to have had a little prayer with you about it."

"Oh, all right, mater, if you like," Dickie returned carelessly. He was coming to dislike the particular form of petition that he expected on this occasion. He had begun to wonder whether Edward and Eleanor, for example,

would not have done better to trust more to their own efforts and less to the merciful interposition of Providence on their behalf. Both of them had the habit of praying for things, and accepting refusal as a sign that they were not "intended" to have them. Edward had prayed considerably at one time about Miss Leake, and Dickie had felt then that the method was nothing less than an attempt to evade responsibility. Eleanor submitted every trifling incident of her life to the Court of Heaven.

"If you like," he repeated as he got up from the sofa, and then he added, with a self-conscious frown, "But all the same, I feel that it isn't much good praying about things if you never try to do them."

Mrs. Lynneker looked slightly distressed.

"St. Paul says we are to 'pray without ceasing,'" she said in that weakly obstinate, half-ashamed manner she had always worn when she had given religious instruction to the children.

"Yes, but we've surely got to buck up a little on our own account as well," argued Dickie.

She agreed to that with the reservation that "we must not trust too much to our own powers," and the discussion saved Dickie from the actual performance of the ceremony, for while they were still talking they heard the sound of voices outside, and of steps on the gravel drive.

"Here they are; it's too late now," he said, with obvious relief.

"I'm afraid you're a little careless about religious matters, dear," Mrs. Lynneker said with evident steadfastness.

She had succeeded in recovering some fragment of maternal authority, but the achievement gave her little satisfaction.

Adela came in, flushed and excited, with a long story of how "one of those dreadful boys in the free seats" had smuggled a dog into church, and of how "Young Frank Oliver had been rather splendid" and had got up in the middle of the sermon and turned the dog out.

Frank Oliver was the son of the village carpenter.

"Decent chap, young Oliver," Dickie said. "He's awfully good at his work—much too good for a little place like this."

Adela thought somebody ought to thank him for what he had done in the church.

VI

Before Dickie went to Cross Street next day he made a casual enquiry of Mr. Bell, and discovered that the nominal proprietor of the Medborough Loan Co. was a certain Mr. "George Smith" who had a very creditable account with the City & County, an account to which he almost invariably paid in in bank notes, and drew upon by cheques payable to his own order.

"Must have another account somewhere," Mr. Bell said, and then, looking at Dickie with a fatherly air, added, "I hope you don't intend to patronise him, Lynneker? I've good reason to believe that that Loan Company is a rather doubtful affair."

"Rather not, sir," Dickie assured him.

The young man in Cross Street was suave and slippery. He evidently knew his visitor by sight, and the "good morning, Mr. Lynneker," with which he was immediately greeted warned Dickie that he must exercise all his discretion.

"I believe my mother, Mrs. Lynneker, borrowed a sum of thirty pounds from you, three years ago," he began abruptly.

"It is possible," admitted Mr. Smith. "I could not say for certain without referring to my books."

"Well, will you look it up?" asked Dickie. "I want to discuss it with you."

Mr. Smith politely refused.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Mr. Lynneker," he said. "As a bank official you will understand, I'm sure, that all our transactions are necessarily personal and private."

"I'm here on my mother's authority," Dickie returned.

"You have a written authority?"

Dickie cursed himself for a fool. He ought, he knew, to have anticipated that demand. "I haven't a written authority," he said.

Mr. Smith shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture with his two hands as if he were testing the weight of an empty parcel.

"But it surely isn't worth your while to quibble over that," Dickie said. "If you won't discuss it to-day I shall come back with the written authority to-morrow."

"If you would do that," replied Mr. Smith, and politely opened the door. "We have to be so particularly careful in our business," he explained.

"I can quite understand that," Dickie said with emphasis. Mr. Smith smiled as if he had been complimented.

"What time shall you be here to-morrow?" asked Dickie.

"I shall not be in Medborough again until Thursday," Mr. Smith said, "but one of the other clerks . . ."

"Aren't you the principal then?" Dickie put in.

Mr. Smith's deprecating gesture implied that he could not take that suggestion seriously.

"But you are the responsible manager?" Dickie persisted.

"I am allowed to exercise a certain discretion," Mr. Smith admitted.

"Well, what time on Thursday, then?" Dickie asked.

"Three o'clock?"

When he was back in the office Dickie remembered that he had forgotten to ask the man if his name were George Smith. A reference to Bradshaw, however, clearly fixed the identity.

"Greasy-mannered blighter," was Bradshaw's description of the depositor, George Smith. "Paddles about with his hands and smiles at you as though you'd just been kind to him."

"That's the beggar," agreed Dickie. "You're sure he is George Smith?"

"Seen him draw a cheque," Bradshaw said.

"Does he draw notes as well as gold?" asked Dickie.

"Big 'uns, sometimes."

"Any of 'em ever come back here?"

Bradshaw could not answer that question, but Dickie found time to make a few investigations before he saw Mr. Smith again.

VII

Mrs. Lynneker demurred strongly to the suggestion that she, also, should go to Cross Street on the following Thursday, but Dickie was patiently resolute and overbore her objections.

"He's such a beastly, slippery beggar," he explained. "It's ten to one he'll wriggle out of it somehow if I go alone."

"And you must bring that little notebook," he added, "and you might help me to make a clear statement of the account for my own use."

The only consolation Mrs. Lynneker received lay in the explanation that she was not expected to say anything unless appealed to by her representative. She was merely to act as a document, for reference. . . .

She sat through the first part of the interview with a set frown of magnificent determination. She knew she was unequal to any struggle with the evasive, intimidating Smith; but she believed that her expression of stony disapproval would be a help to Dickie in his tremendous undertaking.

Not until Mr. Smith politely intimated that she had actually received the various additions to her loans in cash paid over that very counter, did she awake to positive indignation. When she had to choose between the contempt of Mr. Smith and that of Dickie, she suddenly lost her fear of asserting herself.

"Indeed, I never did," she put in. "The only money I had was the twenty-six pound I borrowed first."

"Thirty pounds," corrected Mr. Smith.

Dickie interfered to stop the threatened quibble as a side issue.

"Thirty pounds," he agreed, "less interest in advance and the cost of the agreement. There's no dispute about that. I want to know, now, what evidence you have of having lent a further sum of over twenty pounds in cash?"

Mr. Smith nodded in the soothing manner of one deferring to the wishes of a petulant child, and produced a numbered cardboard box, from which he extracted various receipts bearing the authentic signature of Mrs. Lynneker.

"You signed all these?" Dickie asked, turning to his mother.

"I understood it was a necessary matter of form," she explained timidly.

"You acknowledged receiving money in cash that you never had?" Dickie expostulated.

Mrs. Lynneker saw an ironical smile round the corners of Mr. Smith's mouth.

"Yes, I did," she said firmly.

"Oh, damn it!" Dickie murmured quite audibly.

Mr. Smith permitted his eyebrows to express a faint disapproval.

"Our books are quite open to examination, so far as they refer to this particular transaction," he said.

"I don't doubt that you've protected yourself pretty well," Dickie growled. "This is obviously a case for the police."

"Or for a libel action," put in Mr. Smith suavely.

"It doesn't matter much which so long as it comes before the court," was Dickie's opinion. "You've been obtaining money under false pretences," he went on, "and nothing will stop you, I suppose, but a prosecution."

Mr. Smith appeared to be bored. "If that is Mrs. Lynneker's intention . . ." he began.

She shook her head in great distress and looked pathetically at her son.

Dickie scowled gloomily.

"How much will you take to settle this account?" he asked.

Mr. Smith glanced wearily at the ledger he had brought out and put on the counter.

"Fifty-one pounds, fifteen shillings is the amount still owing," he said.

"Yes, I know, and how much will you take in settlement?" asked Dickie.

Mr. Smith smiled sweetly.

"Fifty-one pounds, fifteen shillings, Mr. Lynneker," he said.

"And if we refuse to pay it?"

"I should, most unwillingly, have to take the usual steps for recovery."

"You would have the impudence to prosecute?"

Mr. Smith pursed his mouth and nodded gravely.

"Don't you think, dear . . ." Mrs. Lynneker began on a tremulous note of appeal.

Dickie's frown cut her short.

"I think you'd better go, mater," he said.

She got up obediently and then looked anxiously at her son, blinked her eyes and made a movement of her head towards the door. Dickie knew that she wanted to make him promise not to let the matter come into court "whatever happened." He felt that he had blundered badly in his conduct of the whole affair. In the first place he ought to have come with a written authority, and in the second he had made a foolish mistake in insisting that his mother should be present at the interview. She had handicapped him hopelessly.

"Oh, leave it to me, mater," he said irritably; but as he opened the door for her, he smiled gently and added: "It'll be all right."

And for once she found a quality of real assurance in the family phrase.

Mr. Smith was looking at his watch.

"Now," Dickie said with a new confidence in his voice.

"I have nothing more to say, Mr. Lynneker," Mr. Smith returned; and his manner intimated that he had no more time to spare.

"Will you take thirty pounds in final settlement?"

Mr. Smith smiled contemptuously, slapped his ledger together, and returned it to the shelf behind him.

"You see it's like this," Dickie said quietly. "I can raise thirty pounds; but that is my limit. If you insist on a penny more, my father must be told about the whole business."

Mr. Smith had turned his back and was apparently absorbed in studying the contents of another account book.

"Tell him, then," he snapped without looking up.

Dickie decided that it was time to play his last card. He was doubtful of its value; his facts were deduced from questionable inferences and the production of his authority was impossible without revealing some of those office secrets he was pledged to guard. He had, indeed, decided that he would not, in any case, play that particular card. But he was full of a righteous anger that was directed not so much against Mr. Smith in person, as against the system he represented.

Dickie had had his first near sight of gross misdealing and injustice; and he was greatly shocked by the realisation that such institutions as the Medborough Loan Company could flourish by preying upon any unfortunate who came within its grasp. He had to believe, moreover, that such frauds could prosper under the eyes, as it were, of English law. If his mother's case came before the magistrates, they might believe her assertion that those "further loans" had been purely imaginary, but they would be unable to give a judgment in her favour in face of the indisputable documentary evidence. And the injustice of it angered him beyond endurance. He felt that it was his duty to champion the cause of the oppressed, even if he risked dismissal from the Bank.

He made a strong effort to recover his self-control before he said:

"Very good, Mr. Smith, if you persist in refusing to accept a settlement, I'm going to take this affair up. Not in my mother's name." He paused and carefully weighed the

form his statement should take before he continued, still addressing the callous back of his audience, "I shall have an unofficial meeting of some of your creditors. There is, for instance, Mrs. Barrett, who keeps the small general shop in Cowgate; William Powell, the farmer, of Yaxwell; the chap upstairs; Mr. Atcherley of Narrow Street, and—oh, half a dozen others whose names I needn't mention just now. . . ."

He broke off to judge the effect he was making.

Mr. Smith had put down his account book and was standing very still. The attitude of his back suggested rigid attention. And when, at last, he turned round and put his hands on the counter, his face was noticeably pale.

"Are you accusing the company of fraud?" he asked.

"I am," Dickie said with feeling.

"And that being so, you are willing to compound a felony for the amount mentioned? Or is this merely an attempt at blackmail?"

Dickie stood up.

"You are quite right, Mr. Smith," he said. "I've made a third mistake. I see that this particular account must be paid in full before any action is taken. You shall have the amount to-morrow."

"We might allow a discount for prompt settlement," returned Mr. Smith, watching his adversary warily, and trying to calculate precisely how much he would take.

Dickie picked up his hat.

"Oh! Lord, no," he said with a laugh. "You've warned me. I'll admit I didn't understand what I was doing before; but I do now. The money shall be paid in full, to-morrow."

He hesitated a moment, decided that any veiled threat, however satisfying to his feelings, was out of place, and then, disregarding the invitation to "wait a minute," he went out, closing the door behind him with a slam which so startled the photographer upstairs that he dropped the plate he was developing.

"All right, my boy," murmured the photographer. "Now

you've done it; smashed the one perfect portrait I ever took. That goes down per contra and wipes out my debt to the uttermost farthing."

He kicked the broken glass under the shelf with a pleased smile.

"Wish I'd never started these infernal midgets," he remarked.

VIII

Mrs. Lynneker greeted her son with an anxious face.

"No good," he said curtly.

"Whatever are we to do?" she implored him.

"Pay it," he said.

"But won't that mean telling your father?" she expostulated.

"We ought to have told him before," Dickie said.

His mother's face set into the expression of weak stubbornness that meant she would not be driven. Her children had come to learn that when they had driven her to that defence, she could neither be bullied nor entreated into submission.

"I can't do that," she said obstinately.

"I've told him that the whole amount will be paid tomorrow," Dickie said, and went on: "Look here, mater, we shall just have time to catch the 3.55 if we hurry."

She had intended to do a little shopping, but it was early-closing day, and she gave way on that question with the one proviso that she must get some fish in Broad Street, which was on their way to the North-Western Station. Dickie went with her, leaving his bicycle at the Bank.

Mrs. Lynneker hardly spoke as they walked the half-mile to the station. She was quite determined that she would not confess to her husband, and she was regretting her weakness in having confided in Dickie. He had done no good and had now become a source of further tribulation to her. She knew that she would have great difficulty

in persuading him that she could not and would not ask his father for the money.

She maintained her obstinate silence during the fifteen minutes of the railway journey. There were two other people in their compartment and conversation would have been difficult in any case. But when they had come out of Halton Station (two platforms and a tiny house standing in the fields a mile away from the village), she opened the topic by saying firmly:

"I can't tell your father."

She was prepared for an argument of the kind that was familiar to her in dealing with her husband and children. The usual counter to such an assertion as she had just made was, "Oh, mother, why not?" followed by, "But I can't *see*. . . ." And she knew that she had only to persist in her determination against those weak responses in order to defend herself. None of them was equal to maintaining an attack against that stubborn, veiled defence; the single assertion, reiterated without argument. Yet she had never deliberately adopted those tactics to win small victories. She was not capable of that. Only when she was fully convinced in her own mind could she thus resolutely persist in making her one unshakeable affirmation.

Dickie surprised and shook her defences from the outset. He ignored her declaration, and went on with an undercurrent of anger: "I offered him thirty pounds, and when he asked me if I accused him of fraud and I said 'Yes,' he put it that if I thought that, I was offering to compound a felony. He was right enough there, you know, mater. I hadn't thought of that, but directly he said it, I saw that I had been taking a bad line altogether. If it were only you he'd swindled it wouldn't matter so much, but there are heaps of other unlucky beggars in it, too. And we can't do a blessed thing to help 'em while we owe this blighter money ourselves. I'm going to put it all straight to the pater this evening. That slimy beast, Smith, must be paid to-morrow, and after that . . ." Dickie's expres-

sion implied that Mr. Smith was going to have a particularly unpleasant time.

Mrs. Lynneker realised that a mere repetition of her assertion would be quite out of place. She was not converted, but she was greatly confused.

"I don't see what your father could do," she ventured weakly; "I'm sure he wouldn't like to be mixed up in anything of that kind."

"Rather not," agreed Dickie. "His job will begin and end by settling our account with Smith. The rest I'm going to tackle on my own."

"I would much sooner not say anything to your father," persisted Mrs. Lynneker.

"Oh, I'll do that all right," returned Dickie cheerfully.

"But you'll have to tell him . . ."

"Everything. I know. We've got to be perfectly honest about it all. We'll never beat Mr. Smith at his own game."

Mrs. Lynneker winced, and thought of the Coal Club. "I can't see that I've been dishonest," she said with an injured air.

"Not in a way," Dickie replied, brutally. "But what I meant is that we've got to be perfectly frank and open. That little beast in Cross Street gave me a shock when he suggested that I was trying to blackmail him—he said that, too. He was so dead right. And just at the last he offered me a discount for a cash settlement; the only time he came anywhere near giving himself away."

"And you didn't take it?" asked Mrs. Lynneker with a surprise which showed that she had still failed to grasp her son's ethic.

"Well, of course not," he explained patiently. "My dear old mater, can't you see yet that if the man's a swindler, we can't let him go on swindling? We must stop him, somehow. And we can't do a blessed thing until we've paid him in full. Even if we accept a discount, we are condoning his methods, and, in a sense, putting ourselves under an obligation to him."

"But what are you going to do?" his mother asked.

"Get him prosecuted," replied Dickie promptly. "You needn't worry about that. He can't drag us in, if our affair's settled and done with."

And yet, with the feeble persistence of the weak, Mrs. Lynneker made one more effort, as she and Dickie came to the door of the Rectory garden. The sight of the familiar place revived all her old dreadful anticipations. She could see her husband's frown and hear that exasperating doubt repeated as to how much longer this sort of thing could go on.

"I would so much rather not tell your father," she said. "Must," was Dickie's only rejoinder.

IX

Both the Rector and his wife came to a recognition of some unfamiliar quality in the mental calibre of their youngest child during his conduct of the loan affair.

The difference between him and the rest of his family, a difference that none of the Lynnekers was able to analyse, lay in the fact that he was not thinking of the effect he was producing on his immediate audience. He was intent, in this particular matter, on destroying what he regarded as a crying evil. His effort to rescue his mother had brought home to him the methods of the Loan Company and incidentally the type of victim it entrapped. The detail of its extortions had outraged the sense of commercial fair-dealing he had learnt at the City & County, and then he had entered through an intuition of his mother's weakness into an understanding of the hardships imposed upon those other unfortunates, who as he had correctly enough inferred from his comparison of bank-note numbers, were being driven and cheated by the unscrupulous Mr. George Smith. They, too—Mrs. Barrett, old Powell, the farmer; the struggling photographer, Atcherley the saddler in Narrow Street—were all, no doubt, making a desperate fight to avoid the misery and disgrace of failure;

and were without question being preyed upon in different ways by the money-lender.

Dickie was full of an indignation that had been brought to a fever heat by his own rebuff; and in his characteristic manner he was bent upon saving these poor, small-spirited people from the results of their own imprudence.

And whereas Edward, Latimer or their father would have considered in the first place how such an effort would present themselves in the eyes of their audience, Dickie tumbled headfirst into the fight without a single thought of how the conduct or the issue of the campaign would affect himself.

His enthusiasm carried him triumphantly through the interview with his father, who almost forgot that he was being bled to satisfy an incredibly foolish debt of his wife's, in the thought—so abundantly suggested by Dickie's fire of righteous purpose—that he was, in effect, financing a just and magnificent cause.

Mrs. Lynneker, trembling, and yet at the same time nursing a distinct sense of grievance, in the sitting-room, was amazed into silence when her husband presently called her into the study, not to frown or complain, but to forgive.

They achieved something approaching an understanding that evening. When her husband had shown that he was willing to sympathise with her trouble, the tightness of her mouth relaxed, and then her reaction carried her so far that she came, at last, to full confession. Indeed, she found it easy, once she had admitted her weakness, to tell her husband the essential fact she had withheld from Dickie.

It was the request that her one criminal failing should be kept from their son, that brought them to a consideration of Dickie's quality.

The Rector had taken much the same view as his wife regarding the use of the Coal Club funds as a temporary means of accommodation. He shook his head gently, and gave no sign of being outraged by the thought that his wife might have appeared in the eye of the world as a fraudulent trustee. Possibly he took consideration of the fact

that at the last resort she would have come to him, and any esclandre would have been avoided.

They prayed together and afterwards, feeling as if they had come out of great tribulation, they warmed to an appreciation of Dickie's instrumentality.

"I shouldn't like him to know—about the Club money," Mrs. Lynneker said, and her husband agreed with a readiness he might have found it hard to defend.

"A queer boy!" he commented.

"He's so practical," Mrs. Lynneker said.

"And so tremendously full of energy. He completely carried me away with his fury against this horrible money-lender. But, honestly, I don't see what the boy can do. I hope he won't involve us in any way."

"He said *not*," Mrs. Lynneker said. "He told me that after this dreadful money was paid, the man could not possibly bring us in."

"Dick has got his head pretty well screwed on, I think," the Rector commented, with a glow of pride. "I should feel very much inclined to trust his common-sense."

"He's very clever; I'm sure he's tremendously clever," his wife agreed, and, after a moment's silence, she added: "I'm so glad it's all over."

That evening the father and mother came to a tenderness for each other and a mutual pride in their children that they had not felt for twenty years. They were united by a strong emotional experience and believed that in future they would understand each other better. They made resolves to be more forbearing, like a young married couple after their first quarrel, although the Rector was only three years short of seventy and his wife but ten years younger.

And if they were far too old, not in years but in habit, to alter their manner of life or thought, they at least achieved a glow of sympathy and happiness that faded almost imperceptibly; and they were certainly awakened to a new respect for Dickie—respect tinged with a fear that neither of them would admit.

IX

GEORGE SMITH

I

ANOTHER individual who came to fear Dickie within the next few weeks was Mr. George Smith.

Dickie went to Cross Street at lunch time next day, produced the full amount of his mother's debt in cash, and demanded a carefully worded form of release.

Mr. Smith made no quibble about that. He was exceedingly polite and gracious, but at the same time quite businesslike. He took the draft of the receipt Dickie produced, and obediently copied it in his own handwriting on a form bearing the imprint of the company. And until that was done, he made no effort at conciliation.

Dickie had taken up his hat and was about to leave the room, when Mr. Smith said:

"I don't think you realise, Mr. Lynneker, how different our business is from that of a Bank."

Dickie made no attempt to conceal his surprise at that astonishing statement. "I thought I'd made that clear enough," he returned, looking suspiciously at Smith. "If I haven't, I can tell you that that's about the one thing I have realised."

"On one side only," Mr. Smith submitted with a slightly injured air. "What you haven't realised, Mr. Lynneker, is that we are a butt for every swindler, and that we have to protect ourselves as best we can."

"By taking it out of other people in order to make your losses good?"

"No, Mr. Lynneker." Mr. Smith looked Dickie steadily

in the face. "If you would give me time to explain . . ." he said.

"Go on," returned Dickie.

"The principle that we have adopted to protect ourselves is that of the short-term loan," Mr. Smith explained. "In our agreement we make it quite clear that the rate of ten per cent. only applies to loans repayable within a specified time, and failing repayment what we do is, in effect, to raise the rate of interest."

"And the amount of the capital?"

"We never insist upon the repayment of that extra capital, Mr. Lynneker. It is only a device to protect ourselves. But we are absolutely bound to insist upon the full amount up to a certain point of the negotiations. It may not appear to you businesslike; I admit that it is not; but unhappily for us, nearly all our dealings are with unbusinesslike people."

"But you insisted in this case . . ." put in Dickie.

"Pardon me, sir, *you* insisted," replied Mr. Smith firmly. "And we are prepared, now, as we always are, to refund any money that you claim was not due to us."

Dickie fingered the receipt in his jacket pocket.

"Well," he said, "as the interest has always been paid, I suppose all my mother really owed you, was the original thirty pounds."

"Not quite all the interest was paid," Mr. Smith said. "I looked up the account this morning, and found that the amount we are willing to forgo, is nineteen, thirteen, seven."

"Do you want any acknowledgment of that?"

"We have a special form. . . ."

Dickie shook his head.

"But in this case . . ." Mr. Smith added quickly.

"I'm not going to accept any bribes," Dickie said.

"Oh, bribes!" repeated Mr. Smith with a laugh, and went through his business with the imaginary parcel. "There is no possible question of bribes, Mr. Lynneker. Our business together is settled and done with."

"Not yet," Dickie said, and went out before the other could reply.

Mr. Smith's expression changed on the instant from polite forbearance to the bitterest malignity. On his mantelpiece were a carafe of water and a tumbler—possibly for use in the case of a client's sudden collapse. He took the tumbler in his hand, glared at it for a moment, dashed it violently into the grate, and then stamped furiously upon the broken glass. After he had thus relieved his overburdened feelings, he rang the gong on his desk, told the office boy who answered it to clear away the mess in the grate, took out a slip of paper on which were entered the names of the clients mentioned by Dickie the day before, and set himself with great deliberation to compose four letters.

Nevertheless, Mr. Smith spoke English without any trace of a foreign accent.

II

Dickie's first grave mistake had been his warning to Smith that their business together was not "settled and done with"; his second was to approach Mr. Bell with a perfectly true account of his sources of evidence.

Mr. Bell was shocked. He was an honest man and a good Christian. His faith was not a convenient form of insurance on which he paid a weekly premium of devotion to cover the sinful risks of business life. His belief in God was only second to his belief in the Bank, and in theory he put God first. But in practice his loyalty to the Bank was the ruling motive of his life.

He made it quite plain to Dickie that on no account whatever could he countenance any use of the sacred evidence in his keeping in order to confound the Medborough Loan Company. Incidentally he made it clear that he had no wish to lose the charge of Mr. Smith's deposit.

"But there's no doubt that the man's a beastly swindler, sir," urged Dickie.

"That does not come within our province, Lynneker," Mr. Bell said gravely. "I am greatly perturbed to hear that you have already broken your trust. It is a very serious matter; most serious. I'm not at all sure what I ought to do about it. But, in any case, it must go no further."

"You mean that you would have to sack me, sir?"

"I'm afraid so, Lynneker. I should be exceedingly sorry to do so. You are the most promising clerk who has ever worked with me, and I've no doubt whatever that you'll rise to a very high place in the Bank—with ordinary prudence. But . . ." and Mr. Bell insisted with perfect steadiness that any further breach of trust must be punished by dismissal.

The whole matter came up again, and with a new heat, after Mr. George Smith had called on Saturday morning to close his account.

Smith was too clever a man to be vindictive. He had no intention of adding to the irritation of Mr. Richard Lynneker by complaining to the manager that the secrecy of his accounts had been violated. But Smith had a weakness. In certain matters he was timid; and he could not rest while he knew that the details of his business might be ferreted out by the clever deductions of the boy who had so distinctly threatened him.

Smith's present game was mollification, but he had not the courage to let his accounts continue to pass through the City & County.

"He made no kind of complaint," Mr. Bell reported, when Dickie had been summoned to the manager's private room, "and it was, of course, impossible for me even to hint that there had been any leakage of private information."

"Didn't mention me?" Dickie interpolated.

"Certainly not. He didn't bring any charge against us of any sort; but there can be no question why he has withdrawn his account; none whatever. I am very distressed about the whole affair, Lynneker. I shall have seriously to consider what to do about it."

Dickie meditated for a moment and then said cheerfully: "Anyway, now he's no longer a depositor, there's no reason why I shouldn't go for him, is there, sir?"

"There's every reason," snapped Bell. "If you antagonise Mr. Smith he will put a report about through the town that we make a private use of our knowledge of customers' business. We should lose half our depositors."

"He wouldn't do that, sir," Dickie said.

"We mustn't run the risk," Bell returned.

"If he did, you know, sir, we could prosecute him for libel in no time," Dickie went on, "and I'm absolutely certain the chap would cut his right hand off to keep out of court. Besides that, sir, I shouldn't think his influence in the town would have the least weight against yours. You are frightfully well known and trusted, I mean—and I should think he's suspected by lots of people."

Mr. Bell was sincerely flattered by the perfect sincerity of Dickie's compliment. To be "frightfully" well known and trusted was the report of himself for which he had patiently laboured.

"I'm sure it's very good of you, Lynneker," he murmured, and he saw a picture of a despised chorister on his first day at the King's School, regarding the "gentlemen boarders" with eyes of awed respect. "They don't mix with us, o' course," one of his fellow choristers had told him.

Dickie failed to appreciate the allusion for a moment, and then wondered why his chief should have been so evidently pleased.

"Oh, that!" Dickie said, and imperceptibly a faint note of condescension crept into his tone. "I should have thought you could have taken that for granted, sir."

Mr. Bell looked up and blinked modestly.

"I hardly know what grounds you base that estimate of me upon, Lynneker," he said, smiling.

Dickie wanted to push that aside and passed it by saying, "Oh, well, my father's always told us how much you were respected and trusted in the town."

Mr. Bell blushed.

"But about this chap, Smith, sir," Dickie went on.

Mr. Bell waved a deprecatory hand.

"Never mention it to me again, please, Lynneker," he said. "I must insist! So long as I am a servant of the Bank, I must consider the Bank's interests before anything else."

He made the statement with pride. He seemed glad to admit that he was a bank-manager first, and an independent individual afterwards in so far as the tendency of his private impulse did not conflict with his theory of official integrity. He was a kind man and generous, and his greatest ambition was to be a trustworthy servant.

"I must go on with this affair, you know, sir," Dickie said.

Mr. Bell clicked his tongue. "So long as you don't make use of our private information, and don't mention the thing to me, Lynneker," he said, and made a stammering gesture with his hand to indicate that the Medborough Loan topic was finally dismissed.

Dickie accepted that dismissal as a permission to do what he liked, if he observed the two restrictions his chief had specifically imposed.

III

With a respect for authority that had not been shaken by his sight of Mr. Bell's limitations, he went to see the Medborough chief of police.

Chief Inspector Barnes listened attentively to Dickie's account of Mr. Smith's methods, and then, by way of anticipating criticism, remarked:

"We've had our eye on the fellow for some time."

"Well, it ought to be pretty easy to scotch him," responded Dickie hopefully.

The Chief Inspector drew a writing-pad towards him, and dipped his pen in the ink.

"You say that this account you've given me particulars of has been paid, Mr. Lynneker?" he asked.

Dickie nodded.

"And the principal in that affair would not appear in evidence?"

"No."

"Then who's to prosecute?"

"Can't you?"

"On what grounds?"

"Can't you raid the place?"

"We've no evidence on which to obtain a warrant; but in any event this wouldn't be a case for a raid."

"Do you mean that you can't do anything?" asked Dickie.

"I think not, at present, Mr. Lynneker," Barnes returned judicially. "As I've said, we've got an eye on this fellow, and I've no doubt that he'll hang himself in time if we give him plenty of rope."

"Meanwhile he's to go on swindling any unlucky beggar he can get hold of?"

The Inspector looked rather offended.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Lynneker," he said, "this Loan Company has not, so far as I can judge, put itself within reach of the law as yet. The case you summarised would only be one for a civil action for recovery; and even so, I doubt very much if you would get a verdict."

"I know; I thought of that," Dickie admitted. "But if we were to threaten this chap, Smith . . ."

The Inspector shook his head reprovingly.

"Come, come, now, Mr. Lynneker," he said, "you must see that we couldn't possibly proceed on those lines."

"You couldn't think of any scheme . . ." Dickie began, but Mr. Barnes was far too good a servant of the Medborough corporation to consider wild schemes for the trapping of criminals.

"We must give this fellow a little rope, Mr. Lynneker," he said firmly. "The police have to be very careful not to go outside their own province. Careful as we are, it has happened before now, I assure you, that we have had

one or two raps over the knuckles at the Sessions for exceeding our duty. I can promise you that we shall continue to keep an eye on this fellow, and when the occasion offers . . ." The Inspector rose solidly to his feet and held out his hand. . . .

Dickie went on to see Mrs. Barrett, the old widow who kept a small general shop in Cowgate. She did not know him by sight and the cheerful "Good afternoon, sir," with which she greeted him was merely an anticipation of probable custom.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Barrett," Dickie replied, and added: "You are Mrs. Barrett, aren't you? I want to see you about the Medborough Loan Company."

"Oh, dear," was Mrs. Barrett's alarmed response, and she sat down suddenly on a stool that was evidently her habitual seat, so promptly and instinctively did she locate it. For one moment Dickie caught an expression in her face that reminded him of his mother.

"Is it about the letter you wrote me?" the old lady asked.

"No, I don't come *from* the Loan Company," Dickie explained. "I want to talk to you *about* them. They've been swindling you, you know."

"And what's it got to do with you, young man?" asked Mrs. Barrett; "and might I ask 'ow you come to know about it?"

"Does that matter?" Dickie said.

Mrs. Barrett seemed to think that it mattered considerably.

"I'm sorry. I can't explain how I've come to know that you've borrowed from these Loan people," Dickie said, "but I know that they're jolly well thieves and I want to prosecute them."

"Dear, dear," commented Mrs. Barrett sympathetically, "you 'aven't nothin' to do with the police, 'ave you?" she added with a touch of alarmed suspicion.

"Nothing whatever," Dickie said.

"An' what is it you want with me, young man?" asked Mrs. Barrett.

"I want you to refuse to pay anything more to the Company," Dickie said, and, in answer to Mrs. Barrett's steadfast shake of the head, he went on: "It won't be only you, you know. There are some other people in the same hole I'm going to see. I want you all to stick together."

"I've always kept myself honest," Mrs. Barrett said.

"Oh, yes, of course," Dickie agreed.

"And I don't want my affairs talked about."

"They won't be. The only people who will know will be a few other people who have borrowed from the Loan Company, too."

"'Oo are they?" enquired Mrs. Barrett innocently.

Dickie smiled. "I can't tell you yet," he said; "not until I get their permission."

Mrs. Barrett considered that statement with an expression of approval.

"An' you won't tell no one about me, till I say you may, then?" she asked.

"Certainly not," agreed Dickie.

Mrs. Barrett rose with some little difficulty from her stool and summed up.

"Well, you go and see them others first, young man," she said. "There's somethin' about you as rather takes my fancy, but you're rather young, it seems to me, for what you're tryin' to do. That Mr. Smith's rare an' artful. But you go and see them others, and I'll talk it over with my son-in-law, George Cummin. . . ."

"The chemist in Priestgate?" put in Dickie.

"Yes, that's 'im," replied Mrs. Barrett, and looked up at Dickie with an expression of simple cunning.

"He knows, then, that you've borrowed from Smith?" commented Dickie.

"'E do," returned Mrs. Barrett, still wearing that look of searching scrutiny. "'Ow many 'ave you got on your list?" she asked.

"Only four besides yourself," Dickie admitted.

"Any of 'em live in Priestgate?"

Dickie realised then why Mrs. Barrett had confided in her son-in-law.

"Does Mr. Cummin owe them money, too?" he asked.

"Oh! that's neither 'ere nor there, young man," Mrs. Barrett said.

"The more people I can find, you know . . ." began Dickie.

"Of course," Mrs. Barrett agreed. "An' meanwhile, p'raps, you'll go on with your calls and give me another look in, in a day or two's time?"

"Oh, all right, I will; thanks very much," Dickie said.

He raised his hat as he went out.

Mrs. Barrett looked after him with an expression of decided approval.

IV

Mr. Atcherley, the saddler of Narrow Street, angrily denied any knowledge of the Loan Company. He was a small, freckled man with sandy hair and he seemed to regard Dickie's visit with an irritable suspicion.

"Young Mr. Lynneker from the Bank, isn't it?" he asked; and when Dickie had persuaded him back into the solitude of his workshop, he was obviously on the defensive.

"Medborough Loan Company? What's that got to do with me?" was the line he took, and made it quite clear that he strongly resented any interference with his private affairs.

"Oh, all right, Mr. Atcherley," Dickie concluded, rather in the Lynneker manner; "I suppose I 've made a mistake."

"You 'ave," assented the saddler with emphasis.

"But I don't see that you need be so . . . put out about it," continued Dickie. "I know this chap Smith is a swindler, and I want to get evidence against him."

"Very good," returned Atcherley, "but why come to me? What made you think I'd got anything to do with 'im?"

"An inference I drew from certain evidence, that's all," Dickie said. He realised that he was being severely handicapped by Mr. Bell's restriction.

The saddler pinched his underlip and looked more suspicious than ever.

"Sorry I can't 'elp you," he said. . .

Mr. Powell, the farmer of Yaxwell, was sympathetic enough within certain limits, but he was hardly sober when Dickie saw him, and the five-mile ride out on the further side of Medborough was scarcely justified by the result obtained.

The farmer admitted his liability, and agreed verbally with every suggestion made to him; but the flabbiness of his answers and his general attitude gave little promise of enthusiastic support. His "Well, sir, you'd know best about that," gave Dickie some vague power of attorney, but small hope of active support.

Dickie moodily reflected that even if he could get a team together, the members of it would be a very difficult lot to handle.

He saw Mrs. Barrett's son-in-law, George Cummin, before tackling the photographer in Cross Street. The chemist, who was not a customer of the City & County's, came into the Bank the day after Dickie's ride to Yaxwell, and invited him to come over to the shop in Priestgate at five o'clock.

Mr. Cummin assumed an elaborately mysterious manner when proffering the invitation, but in his own parlour over the shop, he wore rather the air of an examining counsel.

"Now, Mr. Lynneker," he said with a serious frown, "in the first place I'd like to know how you found out as my mother-in-law was in debt to this Loan Company?"

"Does that matter?" replied Dickie.

Mr. Cummin pushed that aside as irrelevant. "If she was a depositor at your Bank, you might have got at it through reading her cheques or what not," he continued, and was plainly ready to discuss the whole evidence at great length.

Dickie lost patience with the necessity to combat this critical curiosity.

"Oh! Mrs. Barrett put her name on a bank note that had been issued to Smith," he said, "and as it came back to us

through another customer within two days, I assumed that your mother-in-law was probably the recipient of the loan."

"Ah! smart!" commented the chemist. "But now, when was that note issued? Recently?"

"No; eighteen months ago," returned Dickie irritably. "Some one had made an entry in the register to the effect that the note was endorsed A. Barrett, Cowgate. What has all this got to do with what we want to discuss?"

"Well, I'm one o' those that like to have what I may call the elements of a case quite clear from the start, Mr. Lynneker," Mr. Cummin explained, and after an hour's conversation the elements were still engaging his curiosity.

Dickie came near despair during that interview. There could be no doubt that the chemist was in serious financial difficulty, but he was far more intent upon demonstrating his own acumen, which consisted, as far as Dickie could judge, in sifting useless evidence and throwing doubt on every suggestion—than upon taking any practical measures for averting his threatened bankruptcy.

When he was out in Priestgate again, Dickie shook his head with a kind of savage bewilderment. These men, Powell and Cummin, had been so foolishly anxious to create some impression upon himself, one by his feeble agreements, the other by the attempt to demonstrate his cleverness. "What did that matter, one way or the other?" Dickie wondered. "Why couldn't they do something to help themselves? Now, that fellow, Atcherley, the saddler, had been infernally rude, but he was the kind of man that might have been useful."

"I wish I could get at Atcherley," Dickie reflected as he made his way moodily to the photographer's in Cross Street.

On the threshold of the outer door he met Mr. George Smith.

"Good evening, Mr. Lynneker," he said with a gracious smile. "Were you coming to see me?"

"Going to have my photograph taken," growled Dickie.

He lied so rarely that he took it for granted Mr. Smith would believe him.

v

The "studio" was closed, but the proprietor, Wilfred Geach, appeared at the door of another room on the same landing in answer to Dickie's third knock.

"What is it?" he asked wearily. "Midgets?"

"Are you Mr. Geach?" replied Dickie.

"I suppose so," admitted the photographer, and then, as his visitor came into the light of the gas burner that flared within the room, he added: "Seen you in the Bank, haven't I?"

"Yes; I want to see you about the Loan Company, downstairs," Dickie said.

"Come for a reference for their respectability?" asked Geach. "I thought you'd been to them already."

"How did you know that?" asked Dickie.

"Oh, intervals of business," returned Geach carelessly.

He was a young, fair man with a light moustache and a loose wave of hair that sloped across his forehead. He leaned against the door post as he talked and smoked a cigarette. "Medborough don't keep me so infernally busy that I've no time to look out of the window," he said.

"D'you mean that you know most of Smith's victims?" asked Dickie eagerly.

"Victims, eh?" returned Geach. "Victims is good. Now I guessed the old lady having had some herself had tried to save you. Bad shot, what? If you'd been on the borrowing game, you wouldn't have been talking about victims for a few months yet."

"Look here," said Dickie; "can I talk this over with you? I want to drive this chap Smith out of the town, and I believe you're the very man I've been looking for to help me."

"Come in," Geach said. "There's some tea that ought

to be keeping fairly warm yet. This is my bed-sitting room; had to use the other room for a dark room."

The photographer's knowledge of Smith's clients proved to be extensive.

"When I first came to this silly place, four years ago," he explained, "I rigged up a mirror over one of the studio windows, trying a new dodge with lighting. It didn't work, of course; none of my dodges do, but I found it convenient for looking down into the street without opening the window. I'm used to seeing people upside down on the focussing screen. First of all, I used to watch for customers, and then I got more interested in Smith's clientèle—more of 'em, for one thing. And after I'd got to know some of the people in the town by sight, I was fairly fascinated. I've stood on the stairs, sometimes, and heard 'em talking. It's more amusing than waiting for customers, I assure you."

"Well, go on," Dickie prompted him.

"I went to Smith myself a little over a year ago," Geach announced, and Dickie thought it well to pretend surprise.

"After all you know about him?" he said.

"Well, my case was rather different, you see," returned Geach airily. "I never meant to pay him back."

"Splendid!" commented Dickie.

"Think so? You would, anyhow, if you knew all I do about that snake, Smith. He's a caution."

"I know," agreed Dickie. "How are you going to get out of paying him?"

"Sit tight and smile," said Geach. "There's nothing to come. I'm broke in any case. I should have gone before this if it hadn't been for the fifty quid, less interest and cost of agreement, I took off Smith. Fair job I had to get it, too. I spent nearly a week composing a new set of account books to show him. If he had as much time to spare looking out of the window as I have, he'd have known they were written especially for him. But he keeps his ugly face in the back room the best part of the time. It's under my dark room, and sometimes, when there's a real

row on, I can hear 'em at it. 'It's a shameful imposture, Mr. Smith,' they say, and then he oily gurgles at 'em, and presently they come out trying to look as if they'd only just been up here for a dozen midgets."

Dickie's ethical sense was not outraged by Geach's frank admission of villainy, but he remembered Mr. Smith's defence, his statement that he was a butt for every swindler. This was, no doubt, a fair instance of the fraud against which he insured by putting an extra premium on to the account of other borrowers.

"You're a criminal, of course," Dickie remarked thoughtfully.

"Those account books, you mean?" Geach returned. "Obtaining money under false pretences? Yes; I suppose I'm a criminal, right enough. I hadn't looked at it that way before; but it won't keep me awake. Nothing has—yet."

"And Smith takes it out of the others."

"Does he? Yes, of course, he would."

The two young men looked at one another with a friendly interest. They had one characteristic in common; neither of them was concerned as to the personal effect he was making on the other.

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Dickie.

"Enlist," Geach said. "I'll make a damned bad barrack soldier, but I don't see what else there is going."

"I want to smash this fellow Smith," Dickie said; "and I want you to help me. After that you can enlist as much as you like."

"And what am I going to live on, while you are indulging your private spite against poor Smith?"

"Midgets, I suppose," Dickie said with a laugh.

Geach swore without reticence.

Dickie winced. It was the first time he had heard that mingling of the profane and the obscene. His brothers' strongest expression was "D. the thing;" and the worst oath he had heard used at school or at the Bank was relatively Biblical, drawing only upon such classical words as Damn, Hell and Devil; very rarely with any invocation of

the Deity. Geach's condemnation of the midgets to unutterable defilement offended Dickie's ear. The meaning of one prominent word was unknown to him, but the sound of it was revolting.

The young photographer stuck out his underlip. "Shocked?" he asked.

"I hate that sort of muck," Dickie said.

"Brought up pious, I suppose?"

"Clean, anyhow," replied Dickie.

Geach shrugged his shoulders and lit another cigarette. "If you *will* seek the society of criminals . . ." he remarked.

"What's the matter with you?" Dickie asked. "Why have you made such a mess of things, I mean?"

Geach looked at him shrewdly.

"Built that way," he said. "I'm a born slacker. Never did any good at school. Rotten school for one thing—I was a day boy at Oakstone."

"Good Lord!" interrupted Dickie. "I was at Oakstone."

"What's your name?" asked Geach.

"Lynneker."

"I was before your time," commented Geach. "I can give you ten years; but I remember a mealy sort of ass in the third form, called Lynneker. I kicked him once, and he told me it was infernal cheek because I was a day-boy. I kicked him again for that, of course."

"That must have been my elder brother," Dickie explained. "He's a curate at St. Peter's now."

Geach nodded carelessly. "I don't see much of the clergy," he remarked. "They go in more for the cabinet size."

"He said something about being photographed the other day," Dickie suggested helpfully. "Shall I send him along?"

"Don't bother," returned Geach. "I should want to kick him again. Curates always make me feel like that. If I'd known your brother was going to be a curate, I'd have done the job more thoroughly when I was at Oakstone."

Dickie pursed his lips. He was strongly interested by the man, and at the same time definitely repelled. He had an inclination, now, to treat him as Edward had been treated at Oakstone.

"*You* want kicking, too, you know," he said.

"That's only your point of view," replied Geach.

"Don't you want to kick yourself, sometimes?"

"Dunno that I do."

"Don't you want to make money?"

Geach yawned. "I thought you came to talk about our dear old pal Smith," he said. "If you came to enquire into my morals, you can go as soon as you like."

"Well, will you help me about Smith?" asked Dickie.

"It might be rather a joke," Geach thought.

And presently Dickie had a fresh set of names of borrowers from the Medborough Loan Company, some of them marked as those of individuals who were probably near desperation.

"When they don't trouble to do the casual act when they come out," Geach said, "you may bet your shirt they've got it in the neck."

VI

It was after seven o'clock when Dickie came away, and he had to go round to the rear premises of the Bank to fetch his bicycle. As he was wheeling it out into Angel Lane he met his brother Edward.

"Hullo! you're late to-night," Edward said.

"I had some business to do in the town," Dickie explained, and went on at once. "I say, weren't you saying something about being photographed the other day? I wish you'd go to that fellow Geach in Cross Street."

"Who is Geach?" asked Edward fastidiously.

"He's an old Oakstone boy, rather senior to you. Don't you remember him at all?"

"Can't say I do," Edward said without reflection. There was a note of remonstrance in his voice, as if he wished this impossible young brother of his to understand that one

did not remember Oakstone boys who became professional photographers.

Dickie overlooked the implication. "Fair chap with rather dark blue eyes and a swipe of hair across his forehead," he suggested.

"There was an awful bounder of a day-boy, the son of the chemist. . . ."

"That's the man," exclaimed Dickie. "He's got a studio in Cross Street, now, and he's infernally hard up. Couldn't you go there?"

"I don't think I could, now," Edward said deliberately. "I rather thought of going to Haywards in the Market Place. Helen went there. They're rather good."

"You haven't arranged with them yet?"

Edward frowned. "I really can't see that it would be any good my going to this chap, Geach's," he said. "To tell you the truth, I'm not the least anxious to meet him again."

"You wouldn't care to do him a good turn?"

"Not particularly," Edward said, and avoided further pressure by adding, "I'm frightfully late, too. I had to do some people up at the back of the town; ghastly neighbourhood. And I want to get home, now,—” he paused and concluded with great feeling, "to wash."

Dickie made no reply, so by way of emphasising what he intended to be a moral lesson for his brother, and of vindicating his own attitude, Edward went on, "I loathe the feeling of not being clean, and however careful you are, when you have been in the houses of people of that sort, you get a sense of being dirty. I always must have a hot bath before I can eat after district visiting."

"How splendid!" commented Dick, with great solemnity, and swinging his leg over his bicycle, he rode away before the other could reply.

"I wonder what it is exactly that's wrong with Dickie?" Edward reflected later, when his longing to overtake and kick his young brother had passed its first violence.

And Dickie, pedalling furiously homewards, demonstrated his kinship by giving expression to precisely the same wonder with regard to Edward.

Edward found a reasonable solution in the explanation that Dickie was lacking in a feeling for "decency," probably due to a vulgar strain he had inherited through their mother. She, too, had rather queer ideas about "common" people and was apt to be abominably careless about the details of her appearance. Edward frowned irritably. It annoyed him that he should be placed in the unfortunate position of having to criticise his own mother,—but he had positively been ashamed the last time she had come to the Vicarage; she had been so unforgivably untidy. He tried hard not to remember that Helen, also, was a little careless about her clothes. He put that aside with the confident statement that it was "bound to be all right" when they were married. . . .

Dickie floundering among the attempts to analyse the same problem, was confounded by the fact that he himself was the exception within his own experience of his class. His father and Latimer, and without question the majority of their friends, all wanted to wash their hands after contact with such individuals as young Geach. The first and second fingers of the photographer's right hand were brown with the stain of cigarette smoke, his room was indescribably untidy and dirty; the man's whole appearance and surroundings would have revolted Edward, not less than the "criminality" and uncleanness of his mind. But Dickie, while he criticised Geach, and was to a certain extent repelled by him, had no sense of contamination. On the contrary, his interest in the photographer was such that he fully intended to visit him again.

"I don't know," Dickie said to himself. "I suppose it is that they're not really interested in that kind of people."

He was unable, as yet, to carry his deductions beyond that preliminary statement.

VII

Dickie's task of assembling any determined body of debtors to the Medborough Loan Company, was little lightened by the new list of names he had obtained from Wilfred Geach.

On broad lines the borrowers could be divided into two categories—the poor spirited who had undoubtedly been cheated but were afraid to take any action; and those who had comparatively little ground for complaint. Mr. Smith was evidently a fine judge of character in the rough, and made his contracts according to the innate tendencies of his clients rather than according to the nature of their security.

Furthermore, Mr. Smith was aware of the conspiracy against him, and was taking measures to protect himself.

Dickie found that carefully worded letters had been written to Mrs. Barrett, Powell and Cummin, in which it was made quite clear that repayment of the original sum lent, together with interest up to date, would be accepted at any time in full settlement.

Dickie was beginning to have doubts whether he would be able to make any sort of case, when he received unexpected help from the saddler in Narrow Street.

Mr. Atcherley was standing on the pavement in front of the Bank one afternoon in early November, and nodded familiarly to Dickie as he came out.

"Fine afternoon for a Thursday," Mr. Atcherley remarked, pointing the fact that it was early-closing day.

Dickie nodded carelessly, wheeled his bicycle across the pavement and was in the act of mounting when the saddler came over to him and said:

"'Ere, one minute, Mr. Lynneker. I'd like to 'ave a talk with you. What d'you say to popping round to the Angel for 'alf an hour?"

"Is it about the Loan Company?" Dickie asked.

"*Sh!*" hissed Atcherley, and contorted one side of his face into an expression intended to convey warning. He

put his hand up to his mouth as he continued in a whisper, "I know a little room at the Angel where we shan't be disturbed."

"All right," Dickie agreed.

They entered the Angel Hotel by way of the tap room, and as they passed through it, Atcherley nodded to the barmaid and made a movement of his head in the direction of the first floor. "Send 'em up," he remarked, and then to Dickie, "What'll you take?"

"I won't drink, thanks," Dickie said.

Atcherley removed his grey bowler hat and scratched his head. "Just one," he suggested.

Dickie frowned impatiently.

"Oh! well, if you won't . . ." Atcherley said, and continued as an afterthought, "No reason why I shouldn't." He winked at the barmaid by way of giving his order, and relieving himself of the responsibility of bringing a teetotaler into those premises.

He took Dickie into a small but rather luxuriously furnished room on the first floor.

"Landlord's private parlour," he explained, nodded with an air of immense secrecy, and again behind the unnecessary cover of his hand, added, "Where we make our little arrangements, y'know. Ever do anything in that line?"

"What line?" asked Dickie.

Atcherley stuck out his neat little leather-gaitered legs, and regarded them sadly. "Nor you don't smoke, I suppose?" he said.

"No, thanks," returned Dickie.

"Christ!" murmured Atcherley softly. He appeared to reflect on the profoundly saddening problem of his companion's limitations for a moment, and then briskly drew in his legs, leaned forward, and touching Dickie on the chest with a stubby, red forefinger, said, "Now, then, what about this 'ere George Smith?"

"I thought you told me . . ." began Dickie.

"That was before the Newmarket meetin'," Atcherley returned, and with one gesture of his sandy hand cancelled

anything he might have said in that hopeful period. "And it didn't come off, good though it looked," he went on; "which, as you'll understand, makes a very remarkable difference." He broke off as a waiter came in with a tray, made a few cryptic remarks to him concluding with "Red-start for Liverpool; twenties," drank the company's health with one of the usual formulæ, and then as soon as he and Dickie were alone again, promptly returned to the question at issue by saying,

"I was talking to young Geach a couple o' nights ago."

It appeared that young Geach, also, was admitted to the landlord's private parlour in the evenings, and that he had done rather well for himself at Newbury. "Borrowed a couple o' quid from me, put it all on at twenty-five and came home," Atcherley explained with a half despairing lift of his head. He had to drink again before he could continue, "So 'e's in funds just now, talked about payin' 'is rent! Certainly 'e was three parts drunk at the time. 'E's a caution! Well, 'im and me we've been layin' our 'eads together."

They had, indeed, evolved a plan. It seemed that there was a lawyer known to them, who would be willing to give professional help. The idea was to get up a test case and let it be known that on the issue depended a score of other cases of the same kind. They were to force Smith to produce one of those short-loan contracts, and generally to stir up public feeling against him, even if, as was quite probable, they were unable to obtain a verdict. Afterwards there was to be a federation of debtors to the company, all of whom were to refer any applications made by Smith to the common lawyer.

"Make Smith prosecute in every [stigmatised] case," was the effect of Atcherley's summary, stated with the emphasis necessary for the occasion.

Dickie saw at once that the plan was likely to be an effective one, but the whole affair had taken for him a new, distasteful colour. He could no longer regard the prosecution of Smith as the attack upon a malefactor undertaken for

purely ethical motives to protect such innocent weaklings as his own mother. Geach and Atcherley were going to play Smith's own game; and no doubt those two were typical of a small minority of the other debtors. They were all able to defend themselves, and, now that Dickie had given them the idea, they would carry through the conspiracy to a successful issue. And, in effect, they were swindlers no less than Smith. They had borrowed money for their own purposes at a fairly high rate of interest, and now they were scheming to avoid repayment of the capital.

"'Ow does that go?" asked Atcherley.

Dickie moodily kicked the leg of the table. "It sounds feasible," he said.

"'Ow far er you dipped, yourself, might I ask?" enquired the saddler.

Dickie looked up quickly. "I don't owe Smith anything, if that's what you mean," he said.

"One of your fam'ly, perhaps?"

"No," Dickie replied firmly. "Nor any of my family."

"Well, then, where do you come in?" Atcherley asked, and his astonishment was such that he paused with his glass half way to his mouth.

"I'm not coming in—any further," Dickie said. "Geach has all the particulars. You and he and this lawyer chap can manage the rest of the business between you."

Atcherley considered that for a moment, finished his second whiskey with an unnecessarily loud gulp, and then remarked in his enriched manner that he would rather like to know why he had been permitted to waste his afternoon.

"Chiefly because I've been a damned fool," Dickie said, getting to his feet. "You see, Mr. Atcherley, I didn't understand quite what I was doing. I knew this fellow Smith was a swindler, and I wanted to protect people like Mrs. Barrett, and Farmer Powell, who were getting cheated right and left and couldn't defend themselves. But I'd no intention of trying to cheat Smith, on my own account, which is really what you and Geach want to do."

"Only people like me and Geach is to suffer, eh?" com-

mented Atcherley. "Your friend Powell of Yaxwell, for instance, owes me pretty near ten pound at the present moment. Well, Mr. Lynneker, I'd like to know what you consider *I've* done, if you can spare the time?"

Dickie shook his head. "You haven't done anything," he said. "It's the principle of the thing. But it's no good our discussing that. I'm out of this, altogether. I'm not going to stand in your way. You can go on and prosecute Smith,—and dupes like Mrs. Barrett and twenty others of the same kind will score, too, I suppose."

Atcherley put down his glass on the tray with a crash. "Oh! yes, me and Geach are going on," he said, "even without your valyble 'elp, Mr. Lynneker." He looked up thoughtfully and then said with a complete change of manner, "You might tell 'is reverence that them breechings I been doin' for 'im, is ready any time 'e cares to send for 'em."

VIII

The ethical problem that had begun to intrigue Dickie was further complicated for him by the attitude of his father and mother. He felt that he must report to them the whole story of what he regarded as his failure, and approached his confession with a sense that he had proved his incompetence. The three of them adjourned to the Rector's study after tea. The Rector and his wife came to the conference with something of childish eagerness. If they had a subconscious inclination to treat this strange child of theirs with fear and respect, they had a perfectly conscious feeling of surprised curiosity concerning the details of his amazing persecution of that "horrible loan man,"—as Mrs. Lynneker always referred to him.

"I've made a mess of it," Dickie began humbly. "I can see now that I rushed at the thing in an idiotic way without knowing a bit what I was doing. If I'd thought about it a bit more first, I suppose, I should have seen what a tre-

mendously complicated affair it was. I—I want to kick myself, badly.”

The Rector looked grave. He found an ominous suggestion in his son’s tone, and his mind leapt at once to the consideration of two terrible alternatives:—either he had been let in for more money or he was threatened with some exposure of his wife’s transactions with this dreadful loan company. And, like Dickie, Mr. Lynneker had a sudden desire to “kick himself badly” for not having foreseen the inevitable result of trusting so delicate and dangerous a business to a youth of nineteen.

“Well, well, Dick, what is it you’ve done?” he asked, and his charming boyish interest gave place to the petulance of an old man suffering the fret of a life-long annoyance.

“I’ve chucked the whole affair,” Dickie said, and looked up to receive well-merited reproach.

“And have you become implicated in any way?” his father asked, frowning.

Mrs. Lynneker looked on with an expression of terrified anticipation.

“Only to the extent that I began it,” Dickie said.

“Yes, yes, but what does that imply?”

“Implies that I’ve made a mess of it.”

Mr. Lynneker became explicit. “Is there any fear that our name may appear?” he asked, “or that I may be let in for any more money?”

“Oh! no,” Dickie said with a shade of contempt, “not the least chance of either of those things. I’m right out of it.”

“But I don’t see . . .” his mother began.

“Why you are so blue about it, my dear boy,” her husband added. They were both so relieved by Dickie’s statement that they were ready to laugh at his immense seriousness.

“Well, I’ve been such an idiotic ass,” explained Dickie, and went on to give them a fairly articulate account of his earlier negotiations and his vision of the doubtful ethic which had been revealed that afternoon.

The Rector smiled, fondly, paternally. “Really, I had no

idea Atcherley was at all that kind of man," was his first comment. "I have never found anything to complain of in his manner."

"They're all quite different when you get at them out of their shops," was Dickie's summary of his two years' experience at the Bank.

His father nodded sadly, as if he greatly deplored the possible truth of this depressing generalisation concerning the humanity of those tradespeople whose counter aspects were so particularly encouraging. It was distinctly unpleasant to contemplate the possibility that the polite tradesman might be a radical in private life. The Rector was inclined to blame the example set by "that blackguard, Gladstone," whose influence remained to work evil, even though he had retired from active politics.

"But do you think they *will* prosecute that horrid loan man?" Mrs. Lynneker asked.

"Oh! they'll drive him out of the town, for certain," was Dickie's confident opinion.

"It will all be your doing, really," his mother encouraged him; and his father, assenting to that implied congratulation, murmured, "Capital, I call it, eh?"

Dickie looked uncomfortable. "It hasn't turned out a bit the way I meant it to," he said.

His father complacently misunderstood the significance of that statement.

"Just as well, just as well," he said. "To tell you the truth, I'm most uncommonly glad that you shouldn't appear in the case in any way. It wouldn't have done for many reasons. You've achieved your end, and we shall give you full credit for it, if no one else will."

But Mrs. Lynneker, staring at her son's face, had some wavering, uncertain idea of what was in his mind.

"Don't you think he ought to be punished, dear?" she asked.

"I don't know," Dickie said. "Anyway, if he ought, so

ought Atcherley and Geach. I don't see that there's much to choose between the three of 'em."

"But think of all the other people, like that poor old Mrs. Barrett in Cowgate," urged Mrs. Lynneker.

"Yes, there is that in it," agreed Dickie, contemplating for the first time the fallacious proposition of "the greatest good to the greatest number." "I know there is that in it. Only . . ."

His father and mother could fall back so comfortably on their belief in "the inscrutable ways of Providence." The soreness of their respective hurts was soothed by the balm of the knowledge that God had—as might well have been expected in this case—declared himself on their side. George Smith had unwarrantably injured them, they could appreciate *his* wickedness, and with the demure reservation of a willingness—now—to forgive him, they were humbly grateful for the boon of Divine vengeance. Atcherley's and Geach's wickedness was outside their scope. Doubtless there had been some excuse for it—they had been exasperated by this horrible fellow Smith—and there was reasonable hope that in future they would lead respectable, if not good, lives.

Dickie, floundering through a maze in which no path could reach the goal except by the most devious of circumlocutions, could do nothing but repeat the certainty he had of the contingent he indicated by his "Only . . .," the contingent he could not define. He knew that he had blundered, but why or how he could not understand.

And for a time he put that problem aside, as he had put aside certain intricacies of higher mathematics, with a firm resolve to return to it when his mind was cleared by a period of distraction. His reading had been seriously interrupted during the last few weeks, and he returned to it with new vigour. He added a new subject to his steadily widening course of study by including Herbert Spencer's "Principles of Ethics."

IX

Mr. Smith did not wait for the test case to come into court. One morning in the following March, his office in Cross Street was found closed by a tardy borrower who had come to make repayment on the very easy terms that the Loan Company had recently been offering. The visitor was not on the conspirators' list—lately something depleted by fearful individuals who had accepted Mr. Smith's tempting offers of settlement—but the news soon ran through the town.

Smith had gone, but no one was interested in following him. He had left many debtors in Medborough, but not a single creditor. . . .

Five years later Dickie saw him in a first-class carriage and he was wearing an overcoat lined with undeniable sable. He had no air of having been crushed by his expulsion from Medborough.

X

THE GOD OUT OF MAYFAIR

I

EDWARD was married after a two years' engagement; and the affair did something to invade the peace of Halton by bringing four visiting relatives to the Rectory.

The family was fairly well represented. Canon Lynneker, then in his 79th year, was too old to leave home, but the two Culver cousins, Grace and Diana, came—"the girls," as the Rector always called them, although Grace was nearly forty and Diana not more than four or five years younger. Aunt Mary, the widow of "poor Dick," also stayed in the house; and Martyn,—the son of the stipendiary, and now the head of the family,—was accommodated with a bed in the Rector's dressing-room.

Of these four relations, Martyn was the only one who held any particular interest for Dickie. He knew the Culver girls better than any of his cousins, and had stayed at Culver for a week of his last summer's holiday. He liked Aunt Mary, although she was apt to be an embarrassment. Her strong evangelical tendencies would not permit her to neglect enquiry into the state of her nephew's beliefs; and just at that time Dickie felt that he could not honestly face such an enquiry. But Martyn was almost a stranger to the Halton family.

He was apparently an exception from his generation. He had inherited a small income from his father, had been called to the Bar and had then married the only daughter of the late Sir Gregory Stroud. Miss Stroud was some ten years older than Martyn, but she was possessed of a con-

siderable private fortune. Martyn's profession could not have been highly remunerative—he appeared as a junior now and again,—but he counted as a success. He and his wife were frequently mentioned in the *Morning Post*. They were invited to important houses, and entertained modestly at their own little place in Mayfair. And, incidentally, Martyn kept the Lynneker pedigree and knew more about the family than any other member of it. He was, indeed, writing a monograph on the Lynnekers, and had recently been staying with the Carronbridges in Scotland in order to look up material in their records.

He gave himself no airs while he was staying at Halton; his four girl cousins, Mrs. Lynneker and Aunt Mary were unanimous in their verdict upon him, expressed in the single adjective “charming”; but in some way he made them all appear a little provincial by contrast. He was so well kept. He achieved a neat correctitude in every detail of his dress and person without producing any effect of spruceness. He certainly used no scent that could be characterised, but a clean smell, like a faint country air, diffused from him, as if he had just been using some particularly nice soap. And without the least hint of patronage or snobbery, he seemed to include all these provincial relations of his in the high circle of his town acquaintance. He spoke so naturally of his relations with the titular aristocracy or the great figures of political life, that his hearers received the impression that these important people were the natural compeers of the Lynnekers. And yet the contrast between Martyn and say Edward or Latimer could not be forgotten.

It was impossible for the Rector to forget that his nephew had influence, that he might, for example, “do something for one of the boys.” Mr. and Mrs. Lynneker had visions of preferment for Edward; or, possibly, for Latimer, now qualifying for his deacon's orders. They had no thought for Dickie in this connexion. No one considered the necessity for influence in their regard of Dickie.

Nevertheless it was Dickie who was singled out by the admirable Martyn.

II

At the enlarged and greatly reinforced supper table on the evening of Martyn's arrival, he soon picked out his younger cousin for particular notice.

"And Dick?" he asked. "What is cousin Dick doing, now?" He had a rich, well-modulated voice, and his enunciation produced an effect of being a little cleaner and sharper than that of his country relations.

"I'm in the City & County Bank at Medborough," Dickie said, and looked at his cousin with frank curiosity.

Martyn nodded, as if he would weigh before finally approving that occupation. "Good Bank," he remarked. "Do you like the work?"

"I shall stay there for a couple of years more," Dickie said. "I've been there three already."

"And then?" Martyn appeared to be giving his whole attention. He could not have displayed a greater interest if he had been listening to some important statement made to him privately by a Cabinet Minister.

"I haven't decided yet," Dickie replied. "There are a lot of muddles I want to clear up first."

Martyn smiled, an encouraging, ingratiating smile. "What kind of muddles, Dick?" he answered.

"Oh! political and social and ethical, chiefly," Dickie explained, and transiently wondered why he had hesitated to add religious. "I want to understand that sort of thing a bit better, you know," he went on. "I didn't get the hang of them at school."

The others had listened to this duologue with a slight sense of strain. They were a little afraid that Dickie's frankness might prejudice the high social standing to which they had been so recently elevated by the sweet implications of Martyn's conversation.

"Dick is so tremendously thorough," put in the Rector with a nervous laugh, and then Latimer with an obviously ironical intention said, "He's the one bright hope of the family, you know, Martyn."

Martyn's nod might have meant anything. "Do you find much time for reading?" he asked Dickie.

"Oh! every evening, and an hour or two before breakfast," Dickie said, and then being engrossed in the thought of his subject, he added, "and Sundays, of course."

His father and mother and Eleanor, the three people who had a prescriptive right to be shocked, would probably have conveniently overlooked that statement for the time being, if Mrs. Richard Lynneker had not been present. They all no doubt had had suspicions of Dickie's violation of the Lord's Day, but his general behaviour was so good that they had preferred not to ask him what he was reading, when he took his books out on to the lawn or up to his bedroom on Sunday afternoons. But Aunt Mary's presence forbade any shirking of responsibility.

The Rector moved uneasily in his chair and his wife blushed and looked compromisingly uncomfortable. "Not on Sunday, Dickie?" Eleanor said, and she, too, blushed.

But before he could reply to that, Aunt Mary, quivering a little, but very bright and determined, bravely took up the examination.

She was a tiny woman with a sweet, kind face; a modest, gentle creature. But her religion was the most precious thing in her life. In defence of that she was willing to suffer the martyrdom of intruding into the secret thoughts of a casual acquaintance, or of making herself conspicuous in a large company. On occasions such as this she found the "strength to bear witness," by offering one brief, silent prayer before she spoke.

"You don't mean that you do any *secular* reading on Sunday, Dick?" she asked. She was willing to give him a chance. He had, she thought, such a brave, honest face.

Dickie was possibly the least embarrassed person at the table,—with the doubtful exception of Adela, who, although

she secretly applauded his courage, was uncomfortably conscious that he was defending an attainted cause. He had recognised for some time past that this struggle must be fought, sooner or later. He had had no hesitation in facing it on his own account, but he had decided that until he was definitely questioned, he had no reason to give his parents unnecessary pain.

"Yes, Aunt, I do," he said, quietly. "I don't see any reason why I shouldn't."

"Thou shalt do no manner of work," his aunt quoted with a gently reproving air of producing an authority that must override all human reasons.

Dickie still hoped to confine the argument to the side issue of sabbatarianism. "Yes, I know," he said; "but don't you think it's a bit difficult to define 'work' in this connexion? There can't be any hard and fast line. To a theological student, for instance, my books might be a relaxation; and it would certainly be 'work' for me to have to read theology. Anyway, I don't count reading sociology as work."

Aunt Mary was slightly confused by his dialectic. She had all the simplicity of the fanatic. Her rules of life were founded upon a particular exposition of the Biblical text, and to attempt any other reading was in her phrase "dangerous," savouring of delusion and heresy.

And, before she could reply, the Rector cleared his throat and said with a half-supplicating frown, "St. Paul quite distinctly makes that point, my dear Dick, when he says 'neither walking in your own ways, nor doing your own pleasure.'"

Dickie could not place that passage in his mind, but he did not question the accuracy of its application. He saw himself being driven back to his fundamental defence, and for that he was not prepared. He had already come to a vague question of the theory of the divine inspiration of the Bible, but he had put the problem on one side until he could find time to give it full attention. In a way, he had considered that problem as being unimportant. He had

never suffered any of the religious fervours and emotions that had occasionally shaken his brothers and sisters.

For a moment he wore his mother's expression of rather stupid stubbornness. Indeed, he looked so like her for an instant that he gave Martyn the chance he had been waiting for.

"How like Aunt Catherine Dick looks, now and again," he said genially. "And I should guess that he had something of her determination. I distinctly remember her being very firm at Dick's christening. Wasn't it Leopold Albert she wanted for him? And poor Uncle Richard even went off to the church all prepared for Leopold Albert and nearly dropped our friend here when he was told to baptise him by the name of Richard Henry." He laughed pleasantly, and concluded, "You strongly resented the little water you got, Dick, old boy. I don't know what you would have said to a font-full."

Every one, except Aunt Mary, cheered up at once. They were all glad to avoid the unhappy topic that Dickie had so stupidly opened.

"Great Scott, what a young ass you are," Latimer said to him after supper, and Edward heartily concurred in the description.

"What on earth's the *good* of starting a theory like that before Aunt Mary?"

"Well, what do you think about reading those sort of books on Sunday?" Dickie asked.

"Rotten; like using bad grammar," retorted Latimer.

Dickie reflected. "Oh! 'those sort,'" he remarked.

"Quite a bright little chap in some ways," commented Edward.

Obviously, his brothers regarded his lack of tact as more reprehensible than his attitude towards Sunday observances. But Aunt Mary drew him into a corner of the drawing-room later and asked him if he would not come and have "a very serious talk" with her next morning.

These reactions were precisely those he could have anticipated and he could place the others. His father would

communicate his displeasure through his wife, who would probably be a little pathetic in her appeal to Dickie's better feelings. Eleanor would reprove him, as she would have reproved a little boy in her Sunday school class. The Culver cousins would carefully avoid any further reference to the subject. And Adela, he thought, might back him up.

But Adela went further than he expected.

She drew him aside, as they were all saying good-night after prayers; she took him by the arm and pulled him into the hall.

"I say, Dickie," she said in a whisper; "don't you believe in *anything*? You know, in the Bible and all that?"

"I don't know," he told her honestly. "I haven't made up my mind, yet. But don't say anything, old girl, to Eleanor, or the mater or any one, will you?"

"Rather *not*," Adela said. She hesitated a moment, and then whispered very urgently: "I'm not *quite* sure, either. I'm glad you're not."

She fled away upstairs as if she were afraid of being followed.

III

He reflected on Adela's confession as he sat with the others on the front lawn after the women had gone up to bed. That was another tradition of Halton; all the women were sent upstairs at ten o'clock, and then the men smoked, either in the dining-room or when, as now, the weather was warm enough, on the front lawn. The Rector never smoked a pipe in his wife's presence, although he permitted himself a cigar when he drove her out from Medborough.

The garden smelt very sweet that night, and Dickie, who had refused one of Martyn's cigarettes, sat a little apart from the smokers and inhaled the warm scent of the roses that climbed all over the front of the house. He was conscious of a slight elation. He was glad to have had some

confirmation, however hesitating, of his own doubts. He had been alone, so far, in this particular speculation. He knew too well the Rectory's attitude towards "atheists," to expect any sympathy from his own people. And even Bradshaw had been aggrieved when the subject had been, tentatively, broached to him.

"Take my tip and leave that sort of thing alone, Lynneker," he had said. "What's good enough for the Bishop's good enough for me, or for you, too." He had steadily refused to listen to any argument. "There's an answer to all these things," had been his defence; "but I don't happen to know it. It's no good talking to me. If you went and argued it out with the Bishop, you'd get the worst of it in no time."

Dickie had not been able to deny the probability, for Dr. Stewart Browne, then Bishop of Medborough, was a distinguished historian.

Remembering this conversation now, he mused on the absurdity of being influenced by his sister's opinion when he had to set it against that of the author of the "History of the Church Through the Dark Ages." He had read that work and had greatly admired both the manner and material of it. It was so convincingly full of sound scholarship, and so singularly free from the least suspicion of sectarianism. He saw that his pleasure in finding an ally in Adela was purely emotional.

And from that he came to the amusing reflection that Browne's Church History would have been regarded even by Aunt Mary as an eminently suitable book for Sunday reading. He felt that the illustration was too good to be missed; that he must put that point to Latimer and Edward.

He found that they were admiring the quality of Martyn's cigarettes.

"You really can't get anything decent down here," Edward was saying, and Latimer grunted a warm endorsement.—They spoke in low tones, unconsciously influenced, perhaps, by the gracious calm of the night.

Martyn's soft, refined voice came out of the further

gloom with the announcement that he bought his cigarettes at a little shop just off the Haymarket. "They import nothing but Egyptians," he explained. "I must send you some when I get back."

"Awfully good of you," Edward said, and went on to tell of his failure to obtain just this quality of tobacco, even at Cambridge.

Dickie waited for a more favourable opportunity, but the subject of tobacco seemed likely to hold the conversation indefinitely. They presently came to the topic of cigars, and the Rector joined in with a recondite criticism of crops, a criticism to which Martyn responded with the assured touch of an expert.

Dickie sighed and looked up at the stars. Discussions about food or tobacco bored him unutterably. He had given up hope of posing his illustration, when Martyn directly addressed him.

"Are you still there, Dick?" he asked. "You're very quiet."

"Don't know one tobacco from another," grunted Dickie.

"Well, you don't smoke," commented Latimer in a slightly aggrieved tone.

"Does it make you ill?" Martyn asked.

"No! I smoke sometimes," Dickie said. "Doesn't appeal to me, that's all."

"I suppose you think it's waste of time," put in Edward ironically.

"Suppose anything you jolly well like," returned Dickie. "Here, I wanted to ask you, would you say that Browne's 'Dark Ages' was a book for Sunday reading?"

The Rector at the far end of the line mumbled something that Dickie could not catch.

"Oh! well, of course, you young ass," snapped Latimer.

"I don't see why," Dickie replied eagerly. "It's as much work or for 'my own pleasure,' as Conic Sections."

"Good Heavens, can't you understand the difference?" broke out Edward peevishly. "It's the subject . . ."

He stopped abruptly as if his impatience with such crass stupidity had unexpectedly boiled over. -

"Perhaps it's taken for granted that no one would ever read a theological subject for his own pleasure," Dickie suggested caustically.

The Rector stood up; and the outline of his figure became visible as a vague blackness against the dark of the shrubbery across the drive. "Well, Martyn," he said, "don't let me hurry *you* . . ."

"Latimer and I have to go down to 'The Wheatsheaf,' you know, pater," Edward said. "I believe they shut at eleven."

Dickie was the last of the five to enter the house. His father's good-night was noticeably cold, and Latimer found occasion to repeat, with a slight click of the tongue and a lift of the head, his confirmed persuasion that his younger brother was a "supreme idiot."

Up in his own little attic Dickie wondered what they would have said if they had heard Adela's confession. Also he wondered whether it was his duty to study the brands of tobacco, as a necessary social accomplishment.

"It's the only kind of thing they're really interested in," he reflected. . . .

He and his brothers annoyed each other; and on either side the feeling of intolerance increased as they grew older. He hardly ever met Edward or Latimer, now, without starting some argument. If you could call it an argument. His brothers invariably fell back upon some assumption of superior knowledge, as if they had received some imprimatur conferred by the privileges of their education and calling. They contemptuously dismissed him as "a young ass," and asked him if he "couldn't *see*. . . ." And yet, they sometimes gave him the feeling that they were afraid of him. It seemed as if he threatened them—he could not say how—but they appeared, he thought, more and more anxious to shut him up before he had had time to explain himself. If he had not been a mere bank-clerk, he might have suspected that they were jealous of him.

He wanted to understand that attitude of theirs just as he wanted to understand the ethic of his interference in the affairs of George Smith. . . .

It was very hot in that sloping attic of his. The Rectory faced a trifle west of south, and even the good Collyweston slates and sound old workmanship of the roof had been unable to keep out the heat of the July sun. He looked impatiently at his little iron bedstead. He had no desire to sleep; he wanted to argue the whole theory of life with some intelligent antagonist; some one who would sincerely try to answer his questions and not put him off by implying that he was too foolish to understand.

He thought with sudden longing of the river; and decided that he would go and have a swim. He believed he could get out of the house without waking any one. . . .

And then on the half-landing of the stairs, he met his father coming out of his dressing-room.

"What do you want, Dick?" he asked sharply.

"I was so hot, pater, and not a bit sleepy," Dickie said. "I'm going down to the river to have a bathe."

"Absurd nonsense," his father returned.

Dickie had never yet failed—as both his brothers had often failed—in a decent respect for either of his parents, but to-night he felt that he could no longer endure these cobwebs of restraint.

"Really, pater, it isn't anything of the sort," he said quietly, but with much the authority of a parent speaking to a child. "It's frightfully hot upstairs and I couldn't possibly go to sleep. I know people don't usually go down to bathe at eleven o'clock at night, but that's probably because they haven't got the energy. Well, I have; that's all. Don't you think it would be very silly of me to lie stewing upstairs when I might be having a glorious swim?" He was trying so hard to be calm and reasonable.

The Rector looked up, half furtively, at this confident, determined youth, taller than himself by four or five inches, and physically capable of picking him up and carrying him downstairs. But the furtiveness of his glance was due

to an intellectual and moral intimidation; no question of physical advantage could ever enter into the relations of father and son. The Rector fully recognised that fact and could have traded upon it. He had but to stand in his son's way in order to maintain his authority. Dickie would never have attempted to push past him, nor even have threatened such a resort to force. Nevertheless the Rector stepped aside, frowning, tacitly condemning his son's proposed excursion and the method of his argument, and yet unable to oppose the force of the boy's determination.

Dickie's resolution to have his own way in this affair thrust aside the typical Lynneker weakness, with the sheer strength of a primitive force. All the attitudes and devices of manner that served to maintain an appearance of equipoise in the affairs of ordinary life must inevitably collapse before the command of this unequivocating will to a single object.

And Dickie made no attempt to apologise, to explain, to surrender, for the sake of present approval, the advantage he had won. He was not flushed with temper, nor consciously proud of his achievement. He betrayed at that moment no single sign of his Lynneker blood.

The Rector walked sulkily up to his own room, unaware of the fact that Martyn, still fully dressed, had witnessed the encounter from the top of the short flight of steps leading up to his uncle's dressing-room. The old man's anger was shot with a curious strain of resentment not only against his son, but against the coming dominance of the new generation. Edward and Latimer had often been rude in moments of temper, but they had always charmingly apologised later. They had never made him feel that he was beaten and finally out of the race. They were still his contemporaries, representative members of his own family and in all essentials of his own period of thought.

He found his wife still awake.

"Dick has gone down to the river to bathe," he announced with the old fretful temper. "I'm sure I don't know what to do with that boy."

Mrs. Lynneker sat up in bed, so great was her surprise. She usually pretended to be sound asleep when her husband came in.

"To bathe?" she echoed.

"Some absurd nonsense about being too hot in the attic," the Rector explained. "You will have to speak to him very seriously. I didn't at all like the tone of that discussion at supper, and he began it again while we were on the lawn. I wonder if Mary could do anything with him?"

Mrs. Lynneker looked as if her house-accounts had been excessive. Perhaps it was the tone of her husband's voice, or it may have been her consistent misunderstanding of him, but she always felt on occasions of this kind that it was she who was being criticised. In her mind she was defending herself against an inferred attack upon her upbringing of Dickie. Everything, virtually, had been left to her and, now, she was to be blamed because her youngest child had read secular literature on a Sunday, and amazingly chosen to bathe at midnight. . . .

Six months ago Dickie had brought his parents into a closer relationship than they had known for many years; but, now, all his work in that direction was undone. And he, alone, of all their children had any real power over them.

"I'll talk to Mary about him," Mrs. Lynneker conceded grudgingly.

She and her husband said no more that night. . . .

"Did I hear you say you were going to bathe, Dick?" asked Martyn, when the Rector had entered his own bedroom.

Dickie had been standing at the bottom of the little flight of stairs, waiting for his cousin to speak.

"Beastly hot up in the attic," he said. He felt unusually strong and vigorous. He had a sudden desire to tackle this interesting unknown cousin, to find out if he had any theories of life.

"Care to come?" he asked.

Martyn smiled that intimate, inviting smile of his.

"If you could bear to wait while I found a pair of shoes," he said. "You seem to have a habit of impetuosity, cousin Dick."

"Oh! I'll wait. There's no hurry," Dickie returned. "I'd like to talk to you about one or two things."

Martyn appeared faintly amused. "Quite, quite," he said; "I'll be with you directly."

IV

The moon in its third quarter was rising in the south-east as they started, and in the windless warmth of the night it seemed to glow with its own heat. Down in the wide meadows by the river, the cattle were moving uneasily, as if they, too, were unable to sleep. The darkness seemed unnatural; the gloom of an annular eclipse rather than that of midnight.

And now that they were out, Dickie felt suddenly disinclined to open the discussion he had so eagerly anticipated a few minutes earlier. He was intrigued by the strange glamour of the night that seemed as if it could disclose to him the mystery of all religion, the hidden origins of all worship and ceremonial. The thought came to him that through these dim, placid meadows he might walk down into the far deeps of a past that existed still, constant and unchangeable, challenging the fiction of time invented by mankind. Those fundamental things remained, the unmoving background of a human cycle of change that was but a surface figuring of the eternal present.

And then the unfocussed phantasm of his imagination flickered and spun itself into the shape of an unsatisfied desire. It was no new form that was thus entrancingly presented. It had intruded its seductions into his work at the bank, and had come between him and his sociological and ethical speculations on warm Sunday afternoons as he sprawled on the Rectory lawn. But all his training had taught him to thrust these visions from him, as the image

of a thing obscene and impure that was the immediate invention and temptation of the devil. He had been warned, obliquely and obscurely, that by this way he might fall into the horror of unclean living. And he had been strong in self-control. He was no downcast, inhibited creature trained into a habit of futile asceticism. He had natural powers of determination that were the simple expression of his inherent force of character. Nevertheless, in this particular, he was confined by an old rule, he had never faced truth. His disgust was a false, unnatural attitude imposed from without. He might dismiss, with an angry frown, the thoughts and sensations that had come to him in sleep, but he had built up no permanent barrier between him and the urgent temptations of love. For all his restraints, he was weak in this; because his inhibitions were artificial and not of his own expression.

He thrust the vision from him, now, with a faint spasm of irritation. It seemed that it had interfered between him and the glimpse of some enduring beauty. He broke suddenly into speech, as the easiest means of escaping from the implacable seduction of nature that had taken form and walked with him through the night.

v

"What do you think about it all, cousin Martyn?" he asked abruptly.

"'All' having especial reference in this connexion to Sunday reading?" returned Martyn.

Dickie decided to narrow the issue. "Let's take that as an instance," he said.

They had passed the field bridge under the railway, and Martyn was no longer hampered by a fastidious need to pick his way. The wide pasturage under foot was visible enough, now, in the light of the rising moon.

"I think our little cousin Richard is by way of being rather too radical," he said with the intimation of a gesture

that he might have used in court. "Not politically, but generally. It's rather a waste of good time, you know, Dick," he explained. "Certain broad questions have been very equably settled by the experience of generations, and you only handicap yourself by regauging the evidence with altogether insufficient material. Speaking generally, you understand."

"But in this case . . ." Dickie began.

"Don't be so impetuous, old boy," Martyn interrupted him; "I am coming to your particular application. You see, I don't think you have good enough reason to run counter to the opinions of your own people in this case. Personally, of course, I think those opinions—er—a little narrow, perhaps. But you, for the present at least, have to abide by them. You can never hope to change your family's attitude; that's beyond the powers of the most youthful enthusiast. You must take that as irrevocably fixed. So, really, don't you think it's rather for your own benefit to conform, in outward appearance at least, so long as you're living with people who regard the principles of sabbatarianism as a—well, as a Divine ordinance?"

Dickie looked puzzled. He had already caught some glimpse of the possible necessity for this semblance of conforming in relation to the larger question, but there he had been willing to procrastinate because he had, as yet, no clearness of mind. He believed that his parents' attitude towards Sunday reading was demonstrably illogical and unsound, even from their own premises.

"But, look here," he said, after a pause, "if you're sure you're right . . ."

"We are all sure of that," laughed Martyn, pleasantly.

"Well, then, what about what Aunt Mary calls 'bearing witness'?"

"I rather think Aunt Mary does it, and advocates it, for more disinterested reasons."

"Oh! yes, I know, she does," Dickie admitted.

"You see, old fellow," Martyn went on genially. "If we were all to begin bearing witness, whenever we thought

we had proved that our own convenience would be served—justly served, if you like—by upholding our own opinions, the world would be a horribly unpleasant place to live in. One needn't press the adage about Rome and the Romans too far, but there is an underlying truth in it. So often it isn't expedient, for every one's sake, to set up our own little private standard, and declare that we're going to abide by it. It reminds one of those terrible people who seem to go abroad merely in order to brag of being English. It's so provincial, Dick; it's so parochial."

They had come to the river, to a place at which the abundant growth of rushes, waterlily and floating weed had left the bank clear for a few yards above deep water, and the bank fell perpendicularly from six feet above the stream.

"My diving pool," Dickie explained; "only you can't get out here. I swim round and come out at what they call the bathing place." He went on without a pause as he rapidly stripped himself. "There's an awful lot in what you've just been saying, Martyn; and I haven't got any answer ready for you yet. We'll discuss it going back, shall we?"

"Quite," agreed Martyn.

He carefully felt the grass and having assured himself that it was dry, sat down and took out his cigarette case. The burnished gold of it flashed once in the moonlight, and Dickie thought of the City & County and then of its financial test of position. The word "expedience" was ringing in his mind. All his commercial life was, in effect, ruled by some version of this key to correctitude in the respectable business of banking. "Expedient" was a favourite word of Mr. Bell's, and Dickie had never criticised his use of it. But out here, in the freedom of the night, the thought of expedience and the flash of gold irked him with a dozen reminders of all that stale dusty business of the handling and calculation of money.

He stood quite still for a few moments, thinking profoundly. He was stark naked, now, but he had the absolute

modesty of the unashamed. The perfect unconsciousness of his attitude revealed the fine chastity of his mind. It was incredible that he could ever make a jest of the grosser functions of his body.

For one instant, as he stood there, he seemed to be the representative of some finer race still to come, the race that shall have acquired a greater independence of mind, that in their humour shall laugh over greater issues than their own mechanical limitations. And five seconds later he was a modern schoolboy, revelling and sporting in the touch of the cool water; calling to his cousin that he "ought to come in," that the river was "ripping" and "clinking"; tossing his head and splashing and blowing like a porpoise.

Martyn had winced when Dickie plunged, but he need not have feared a sprinkling. Dickie had gone into his pool with the clean grace of an accomplished diver. Now, as he listened to his cousin's boyish shouts of enjoyment, Martyn was congratulating himself on the accomplishment of a desired object.

His belief in the tradition of the Lynnekers and in the advantages of family was the most real thing in his life. He had always cherished the ambition of reinstating himself in the old family home, of rebuilding the house and taking up again some semblance of the old state. But he had soon realised his own limitations as a barrister. He had manner, presence, even eloquence, but not that apprehensive mental grasp which is essential to the successful lawyer. The Lynneker vein of incapacity, the inability to maintain attention for any protracted length of time was fatal to him. No ease of manner or quickness of wit could compensate for the fact that when he came into court, he had not mastered his brief. The lawyers who had engaged him as junior on some recommendation or another, soon marked his weakness. They said it was a "pity"; that he had many qualifications and might have done well if he had not been so "damnably careless." He was not careless; at thirty he had been anxious and eager, but he suffered from the awful Lynneker inertia. There were times when

he could not by any effort of will concentrate his attention on the dull details of a case.

His marriage had given him new hope, but his wife had proved difficult. Her father's baronetcy, now held by her cousin, was one of the oldest in England. From her standpoint the Lynnekers were merely good yeoman stock, and as she had no children, she intended the bulk of her fortune to return to the Strouds.

And so, tentatively, for the last year or two, Martyn had been toying with the fancy that he might play fairy-godfather to one of his own people; and he had looked round, trying to discover among his younger cousins some sign of aptitude or capacity that might be worth encouragement. That preliminary survey had been a complete failure. He knew his own breed so well, and was peculiarly quick to note the marks of his own inertia. He had had one of the Culver boys staying with him for a month in town that May, a desperate hope that had ended rather disastrously in a liaison with one of the Mayfair housemaids.

But, to-night, his sanguine temperament induced him to believe that his object was attained; and as he watched the boisterous Dickie revelling in his midnight bathe, Martyn was, in thought, genially congratulating his uncle on having introduced that strong plebeian strain of the tea-merchant to qualify the poor Lynneker blood. Edward and Latimer had missed the benefit; but this gloriously radical young dissenter, with his aptitude for figures, his robustness and his beauty (Martyn had missed no detail of that handsome head and firm strength of body, faintly mystified by the failing moonlight), was an ideal hitherto beyond the amplitude of his most inspired imaginings.

All this suggestion of nonconformity was but the ebullience of youth, he thought; a little instruction in the ways of the world, a little experience under the influence of good example, a little tactful management—and these anarchic symptoms would quickly be reduced.

Dickie's head suddenly emerged in the middle of the bathing-pool.

"I'll just swim down and come out, now," he announced breathlessly. "Had a clinking bathe."

The black ripples that marked his passage down the river were edged and inlaid with a delicate filigree of silver moonlight.

They did not revert to their discussion on the way home. Dickie was abounding with physical energy; he jumped ditches for the sole reason of jumping back again; and once he threw himself down and rolled exuberantly in the grass.

"I feel awfully fit, to-night," was the only apology he offered to his cousin.

Martyn smiled affectionately. He was glad to be left alone with his mounting dreams.

A little tact, he thought, a little management, was all that was required.

VI

He suffered a slight reaction the next morning. The atmosphere of the breakfast table was a little chilly. Edward, Latimer and Adela had all been late for prayers. This was a special occasion, and their excuses would have been accepted by their father if the family had been alone, but Aunt Mary's presence compromised him. Both he and his wife were conscious of coming under criticism. They were both very fond of their sister-in-law but her amazingly consistent piety rather shamed them at times.

And if she made no reference at breakfast to the defect of earnestness implied in missing family worship, she was ominously quiet, and made what might have been a preface to the general attack by asking Dickie if he could come and have a quiet talk with her that morning.

"I'm afraid not, Aunt," he said without a shadow of hesitation. He looked very fresh and vigorous, and was eating quite an astonishing breakfast, Martyn noticed.

Aunt Mary looked up with a little flush of hurt surprise. "I should very much like . . ." she began with the hint of a quiver in her voice.

"But I'm just off to the Bank, you see, Aunt," Dickie explained.

"Oh! I didn't know. I thought you would be sure to have a holiday, to-day," she said.

Dickie smiled tolerantly. "I don't know why every one seems to think I can take a day off whenever I like," he remarked. "Mater and Edward suggested that I should stay at home to-day. And as a matter of fact, Mr. Bell has to go up to the head-office this morning, and Bradshaw and I will be in charge, with two confounded juniors to look after into the bargain. Been rather hard work since Cartwright was transferred,—he was our head cashier, you know, Aunt."

"I suppose you feel tremendously important," put in Latimer.

Dickie leaned forward and looked at his brother, who was sitting on the same side of the table. He was not angry with Latimer. Those foolish sneers of his never hurt Dickie; they were always too wide of the truth. But he was peculiarly conscious of the web about him that morning. He had been up since a quarter to seven overhauling his decadent bicycle, and as he had worked, he had been harried by a feeling of restraint. The influence of the night, and the strange sense of liberty it had brought, was still strong about him; and now, the threat of this futile conversation that he must hold with Aunt Mary, had come to symbolise all the petty hindrances that prevented the free expression of his thought. He cared so much for his family that he desired all the more eagerly to be perfectly frank with them.

"Why important, Latimer?" he asked, with a challenging air.

Latimer flushed and kept his eyes averted as he muttered, "Sounded as if you thought the Bank would smash if you weren't there." He was always embarrassed by his broth-

er's direct attack. He had preferred to avoid any direct encounter ever since the historic fight in that dining-room in which they were now sitting; but he thought he was safe in the present company.

Dickie still leaned forward. "Well, can't you distinguish between sticking to your job and imagining it can't get on without you?" he asked. "Or is the idea of sticking to any job beyond your conception?"

A perceptible shiver ran round the table. He had touched them all, except Aunt Mary, who was not a Lynneker, on their most sensitive side. Even Martyn looked thoughtful and perplexed. They were offended, and every one of them was prepared to deny strenuously that the implied charge was true. But they broke into no clamour of expostulation. Latimer mumbled something half audible about "infernal bumptiousness"; the Rector looked ostensibly at his watch; Edward frowned in the very manner of his father; and then one of the Culver girls began very brightly to relate an adventure with "such a tremendous moth," that had invaded their room last evening.

Without question, they were all relieved when Dickie took his father's hint, and said that he was afraid he must go. It was characteristic of him that in face of all that implicit disapproval he would not forsake his point.

"I suppose you'd feel important, Latimer, if you were ever in time for anything," was his parting shaft.

But Martyn, although he had been glad to be spared the unpleasantness of a scene at the table, and although he was beginning to realise that the proper training of Dickie was not a work to be lightly undertaken, was nevertheless very conscious of regret at Dickie's absence during the day. Something went with him out of the air of the Rectory. Latimer's assertions of Dickie's requirements in the matter of kicking when he and Edward and Martyn were out in the garden after breakfast, appeared as stupid, rather boyish brag. Edward's man-of-the-world air, and his attempts to revive last night's discussion of tobacco were flat and boring. The Culver girls were so obvious, and

Mrs. Richard Lynneker's piety an intrusive nuisance. It was all so stale and familiar, so terrifyingly representative of the do-nothing, charming Lynneker type.

Martyn, moving delicately and tactfully among his relations, found his thoughts continually dwelling with a sense of expectation on Dickie's return from the Bank. In Martyn's thoughts that day, Dickie rose to become Prime Minister.

The ambition wore an air of sufficient plausibility. The Bar was to be the gate of entry. Influence could be used; influence would be found easily enough to back such undoubted ability. In five or six years he could be tried at some hopeless by-election. After that, a seat would be found for him. And the moment was a happy one. Martyn knew that the impending election would return the Salisbury ministry to power with a thumping majority. The Liberals were no longer a party. Chamberlain and Devonshire had come over to the right side. Rosebery was at loggerheads with Harcourt; and the country at large was sick of Home Rule, and regarded Local Veto and Welsh Disestablishment with no particular favour. The Liberals had no men and no platform. Martyn was quite confident as to the result of next week's general election.

VII

In the afternoon he expounded that subject to his uncle, who listened with respect, was greatly comforted by his brilliant nephew's assurance of victory, and only made one reference to the scoundrelism of Gladstone. And then Martyn, warmed by the obvious appreciation of his gifts, and elated by the consciousness of power and the fervour of his dreams, opened his proposition with regard to Dickie—already the plan had taken practical shape. He went so far as to assert that Dickie had the brains of the family.

The Rector made but a single protest. When this startling proposition was opened, he was still suffering per-

plexed qualms anent the increasing difficulty of "managing" his youngest son. He was like a little child confronted by some petty obstacle, and confusedly trying to overcome it while a dozen other paths lay open to him. He had become entangled in the intricacies of his own plans to set Dickie right concerning the need for respect of the Church's teaching. He had been conscious of an added strength in the presence of Aunt Mary. The Rector and his wife had confessed that they always "felt better" for her visits. She was such a splendid example of "godly life."

And so, just at the opening of Martyn's proposition to adopt Dickie, Mr. Lynneker frowned uneasily and protested that he did not know what to do with the boy, and asserted that he was headstrong and self-opinionated. But Martyn's enthusiasm and his confidence that these faults were but the first indication of a strong personality, soon diverted the Rector's imagination into another channel. Before the probable glories of Dickie's career had been half unfolded, his father was thrilling with a faith that even outran his nephew's. The old dream of the Oakstone prize-day returned with a new force, returned and took a stronger, more definite shape. . . .

The tea-party in the drawing-room despatched Latimer, at last, to see "what *had* become of your father and cousin Martyn," as Mrs. Lynneker put it. She was in very good spirits that day. She liked the company of the extra visitors,—she was always at her best among a large company,—and she looked forward to the exciting ceremony of the next afternoon.

The Rector's chair had been kept empty for him, but he refused to take it when he came in, pressing Martyn into it, and then announcing, without preface, that his nephew had something to tell them.

Edward looked self-conscious and modestly busied himself with an empty tea-cup. In the circumstances he could feel no doubt that the announcement concerned himself; and Martyn certainly seemed to know the right people.

For one ecstatic moment the vision of a future bishopric danced before Edward's eyes.

"Oh! it's nothing, nothing," Martyn said with his ingratiating, aristocratic smile. "Uncle Henry and I have been discussing Dick's future, that's all. You see, Aunt, I have as great a faith in Dick's possibilities as you have, yourself."

"Martyn has most generously offered to pay all Dick's expenses and train him for the Bar, under his own ægis," put in the Rector.

"With the idea of putting him forward, later, as a candidate for Parliament," added Martyn casually.

One of the Culver girls was heard to whisper that Martyn was such "a capital person."

Edward came forward with the remark that "it would be a magnificent chance for Dickie." He wanted to make it quite clear, at once, that he had never imagined it possible that Martyn could do anything for *him*. And Latimer had no choice save to display his generosity and his ready forgiveness of the breakfast-table incident by admitting that Dickie had "certainly got a lot in him." (Even when they were alone, together, later, Edward and Latimer were at immense pains to disguise their chagrin from each other.)

Mrs. Lynneker beamed her gratitude. "You're the *deus ex machina*, Martyn," she said. "Doesn't that mean the god out of Mayfair?"

"Can you see Dickie in a wig and gown?" asked Adela of the company in general, and Diana, the youngest Culver girl, who had the reputation of a mimic, was suddenly inspired to "do" her cousin. She had caught one or two of his gestures and produced a very fair imitation of his voice.

Aunt Mary, after she had entered the hesitating suggestion that London was full of temptations for the young, seemed pleased that her nephew should have such wide opportunity to develop his powers.

Without doubt, they all believed in him. Even Edward and Latimer had faith in his ability. They felt it to be

their duty to criticise the form his ability had taken,—it was uncharacteristic, it did not conform to their natural tastes or to the traditions of the family,—but, however grudging their admiration, and they were excusably biassed by the reflection cast upon their own competence, they recognised the virtue of just those qualities which they themselves lacked. In small ways they had secretly attempted to imitate him.

The whole party sat so long over tea discussing Dickie's future, that they were still in the drawing-room when he returned from the Bank.

VIII

Diana had the happy impulse to stand up and bow to him as he came into the room. His mother instantly accepted the cue and followed suit; and then all the others, even his father and Aunt Mary, rose and faced the hero of the occasion. They were in a mood to chaff him; a little self-conscious of the inherent weakness in themselves that made them build such high hopes on his power to bring honour to the family.

Dickie stopped in the doorway and looked back at them with a tolerant smile.

"I haven't got the joke, yet," he said.

"We're doing honour to the future Prime Minister," his mother announced.

"The hope of the family," Aunt Mary added, in her clear, sweet voice.

"I hadn't heard of it, you know," Dickie said. "I suppose there isn't any tea going? It's frightfully hot."

Martyn stood with his arm on the mantelpiece, quietly conscious of the fact that he was the god from Mayfair who had wrought all this happiness and excitement.

Dickie learnt the story of his promotion piecemeal as he drank his cold tea. He rose to the ministry by Adela's suggestion through the chancellorship of the Exchequer because he was "so good at counting money."

He made no reply to the battery of chaff that lit up the background of his father's half-humorous recountal of "Martyn's generous offer"; but once or twice he looked up questioningly at his cousin, who nodded intimately as if to say that they two would discuss the true inwardness of this, later.

"It's most tremendously good of you, cousin Martyn," Dickie said, at last, when it was evident that all the essentials of the Grand Announcement—Adela's phrase—had been told.

"You're putting the shoe on the wrong foot, Dick," returned Martyn gracefully. "I'm looking to you to do something for the family. We want some one to represent us."

"Aren't you going to bow?" interpolated Edward.

Dickie blushed uncomfortably. He was embarrassed by all these compliments, whether they came direct as from Martyn, or were couched in the half-ironical manner of his own people. He was by no means sure, as yet, if he wanted to accept the offer that had been made to him. There were so many problems to be settled; and if he were to read for the Bar he would have, he thought, no time for other issues. And he would no longer be free. He would owe everything to his cousin. It would be his duty to follow Martyn's direction, and already Dickie knew that that would conflict with his own ideal of conduct. Expedience! He would always be confronted with that oily word, expedience.

He got to his feet and bowed clumsily to Martyn. "I say, you won't mind if I think this over a bit, will you?" he asked.

"Oh! quite, quite," agreed Martyn readily. "And we must discuss it with each other."

"Oh, rather! Thanks," Dickie said awkwardly, and then, "Isn't it getting awfully late, mater?"

"What an extraordinary chap you are," commented Edward.

A chill had come over them. They could not help feeling that they had in some way been reproved for their enthusiasm. It had never occurred to any of them that

such a plan as this could require to be "thought over." It was the obvious, romantic introduction to fame; naturally they had accepted Martyn's offer with enthusiasm and made an occasion of it. Now they felt a little like children, called to order in the middle of a romping, noisy game. And they excused themselves and their resentment by finding fault with Dickie. Edward had summed up the general feeling when he declared that his brother was an extraordinary chap. He was, indeed, not "ordinary" by Lynneker standards; and for these ten people in the rectory drawing-room any other standard was a thing suspect, savouring of radicalism.

IX

Even Martyn, who could not count himself among the rebuked, was slightly depressed. He had anticipated difficulties in the progress of Dickie's social education; but not an initial obstacle to be overcome.

He hesitated on the verge of an excuse when Dickie proposed that they should go out into the garden after supper. "There are one or two things I should like to ask you," Dickie said.

Edward, the only other person in the dining-room at that moment, was provoked to remonstrate.

"You don't seem to realise," he said, getting very red, and indignant, "that cousin Martyn has made you an extraordinarily generous offer. I suppose it doesn't strike you that you might be decently grateful, and leave *him* to ask the questions." And then he got so hot over his inability to express his condemnation that he descended to something approaching vituperation. "Is it that you haven't got any sense of decency?" he asked. "Or do you get your manners from those cads in the Bank?"

Dickie looked at his brother with restrained contempt. He was growing tired of these Lynneker rules of life, these conventions of what they called decency.

"Oh! good Lord!" he said, "this is my affair, not yours, and I'm going to consider it in my own way. I can't help it if it isn't your way. If you don't like it, go upstairs and wash as you do after you've been visiting your parishioners. But don't talk all this rot about decency to me; I'm sick of it."

Edward's flush did not subside, but he could not meet his brother's quiet, unshrinking stare. He looked down at the table-cloth and began to fidget with the salt-cellar. "You're so infernally . . ." he began, and then passionately upset the salt-cellar and went out, slamming the door behind him.

He had done as much as any Lynneker could, in the face of great opposition. The utter abandonment implied by his spilling of the salt must surely show that he was intensely in earnest. But until the threat of his violence had had time to produce an apology, he meant to keep his temper at white heat. He could not face the company in the drawing-room, and had reached the first floor before he realised that there was no bedroom in which he could take refuge. And presently, when he had stood gloomily staring out of the landing window for nearly twenty minutes, he came agreeably to the decision that, after all, Dickie's rudeness was not worth all this trouble and fuss.

As he returned to the society of his family, he determined to be very polite and distant with his younger brother in future. He found consolation in the thought that he was to be married next day. Helen would necessarily take his part after to-morrow; and he would have more authority. They would ask Dickie to stay with them and set him an example of good manners. . . .

And Dickie had forgotten the scene before Edward had been gone two minutes.

"You see, Martyn," he began, "I do feel that your offer's so tremendously important. Perhaps Edward is right; I expect I'm a bit rude sometimes; but I take these things more seriously than they do."

Martyn had turned his back on the two brothers and

walked over to the window while the quarrel was in progress. He came back into the room, now, and smiled, a little abstractedly, at his cousin. "Oh! yes, quite," he said.

"Shall we go into the garden?" Dickie continued, with a glance at the supper table. "I expect they want to clear away."

Martyn nodded, as if he were thinking of something else. He often used an appearance of absent-mindedness as a defence against direct attack.

He wore that look, still, as he listened to Dickie's case in the twilit garden; and his replies were largely confined to his agreeable "Quite," or to a nod of the head that seemed to admit his ability to appreciate the point of view presented, while he held some difficult objection permanently in reserve. His manner was a criticism of his cousin's case; it implied an exquisitely polite tolerance of the other's immaturity.

"You see," Dickie said, "I haven't at all made up my mind yet about politics. I admit I haven't had much experience; but two years and a half ago when there was all that fuss about Home Rule, I heard speakers on both sides, and it didn't seem to me that either of them played the game. They weren't a bit honest, Martyn. Their arguments all seemed to me so jolly low down. They were just trying to make people wild with the other side; they never, really, put the case for Home Rule at all; either of 'em."

And then after the attentive punctuation of Martyn's reserved nod, he went on, "And I couldn't do that, you know. Of course, I don't know that I could speak at all from a platform—I should be blue with funk, I expect—but if I could, I should have to say what I felt about the thing. I couldn't put up any kind of rot just to make people think that the other party were a deadly set of blighters, who couldn't be trusted."

Martyn's "Quite" seemed to indicate some agreement with that opinion; but somewhere behind it lurked the sug-

gestion of that expediency, which Dickie was beginning seriously to suspect.

"Is it *always* necessary, Martyn, to pretend something you don't feel, in politics and society?" he asked.

Martyn roused himself a little, to deal with that.

"You don't believe in tact or diplomacy in any walk of life, eh, Dick?" he commented with genial condescension.

"I don't know. I suppose I do," replied Dickie. "They all say I'm an awful blunderer. I think I've got rather too fed up with a certain kind of tact. It's so jolly like letting things slide."

"That wouldn't be the kind of tact you would be expected to exercise in politics and society," remarked Martyn.

"No. I can see that," remarked Dickie. "But what about being absolutely dishonest? Is there any real difference between concealing a truth, and telling a lie outright?"

"Certainly, I should say," Martyn said.

"Even if what you're after is just to deceive people?"

"You are so horribly fundamental, Dick," Martyn said with a rather whimsical tolerance. "Believe me, even in ethics there are more than two categories. I quite understand that you would never consent to be a 'trimmer,' but surely, you might make a few concessions to the common acceptances of nineteenth century manners."

Dickie impatiently ruffled his hair. He could see dimly some vision of an honest attitude that was neither self-assertive nor rude, but whenever he tried to focus his sight of it, it began to take on some air of his family's weakness. He could not realise how hopelessly he was still prejudiced by his reaction to one, very limited, set of qualities and opinions.

"But there's too much damned 'expedience' about it," he broke out intolerantly. "It's all done to push oneself and get a position. That's all right, no doubt, but what I want chiefly to do is to—to find out about things. I—I want to know what's at the bottom of things."

"Oh! quite," agreed Martyn.

Honesty was an admirable quality, he reflected; but it

might be overdone. Carried to an extreme, honesty was nothing but stupidity.

Martyn was afraid that, after all, his young cousin was, in some ways, rather stupid. It would be a colossal task to educate him in the ways of the world.

"Shall we talk it over again to-morrow?" he asked. "I don't know whether it was our midnight excursion, Dick, but I'm feeling a little tired to-night."

x

But when they joined the family in the drawing-room, neither Martyn nor Dickie suggested the possibility that the scheme might fall through. Martyn, indeed, referred to it as to a *fait accompli*, although no longer with the same enthusiasm. His manner was a trifle absent-minded and tired that night; he was very silent when the men of the party were smoking on the lawn after prayers, and went to bed early, with the smiling excuse that he wanted to be in his best form for the great function to-morrow.

Edward, too, was very quiet that evening. He had had time to consider his quarrel with Dickie; and now, out here under the stars, filled with the noblest thoughts and resolutions concerning the great change that was coming over his life, he was determined to set his house in order, as he put it, so that he might go to bed with a clear conscience, and be able to enter the holy state of matrimony free from all offence. He had been mentally studying the familiar marriage service with new inspiration during the last half-hour, and had found it full of material for solemn resolutions.

And when he and his father and brothers were alone, he pushed his chair nearer to Dickie's and said, with a confused blush, that was covered by the darkness, "Care to take a stroll?"

Dickie had been deep in the intricacies of a problem that sought to reconcile ethics and current manners, and he started and asked absently,

"Where to?"

"Just up and down the lawn," Edward said on a note of faint reproof. It was incredible to him that his brother could be considering any subject other than their recent quarrel.

"All serene," agreed Dickie. He remembered, now, that he was in for one of the usual scenes of reconciliation; scenes that bored and irritated him by what he regarded as their futility. But to-night was an exception. Even Dickie was prepared to give Edward a little special consideration on the night before his marriage.

Edward took his brother's arm as soon as they were on their feet, and immediately plunged.

"Sorry, old chap," he said. "I'm afraid I rather lost my temper."

The proper response to this generous admission was an instant disclaimer and a personal assumption of all blame; from that one could go on, without overt sentiment, to a warm feeling of brotherhood. Dickie failed, as usual, to say the right thing.

"Oh! I'd forgotten all about it," he said casually.

His intention was to pass over the absurd incident as quickly as possible, but Edward inferred an obstinate grievance.

"Well, I'm sorry," he said, with a little stiffening of manner. "I can't say more than that." And then, with a more elder-brother air, he went on, "We do try to make all allowance for you, Dick, but—I suppose you don't realise it—you are rather annoying at times."

"I daresay," Dickie agreed carelessly.

"I do think, you know," Edward continued gently, "that you might have shown a little more enthusiasm over Martyn's offer."

"But I don't *feel* enthusiastic," submitted Dickie.

"What an extraordinary chap you are!" commented Edward, and returned to his point with the suggestion that in a case like that one might at all events make a show of gratitude.

"I don't know," Dickie replied solemnly—he was right in the thick of his problem, here; "I'm not at all sure of that, yet. It seems to me that all that pretended gratitude would have been rather dishonest. What it would have come to was that I should have been trying to flatter Martyn and keep a hold on the offer until I'd made up my mind whether I'd accept it or not."

Edward was growing impatient. He hated these ignorant criticisms of established things. He had no argument to meet such attacks. Argument on such subjects was manifestly absurd. These things *were* so, and if a young fool like Dickie couldn't jolly well see it for himself, he ought to be jolly well kicked.

"Oh! rot," he commented tersely.

"You say it's rot, but you won't say why," Dickie returned.

"It's so obvious," Edward said.

"Well, tell me why a lot of blarney I didn't mean would have been a better way of treating Martyn than being perfectly frank with him."

Edward snorted. "It isn't a question of blarney," he said, trying to curb his impatience by a resolute thought of his coming marriage. "But what riles me is that when a generous offer is made you, a confoundedly generous offer, you turn up your nose at it and say you'd like to think it over . . . and cross-examine Martyn on it . . . and generally behave as if you'd been rottenly insulted."

"What utter bosh!" laughed Dickie. "I thanked him in the drawing-room." He paused for a moment but before his brother could find the necessary exaggeration to stigmatise the manner of that thanksgiving, he went on: "No, it comes to this; really it does; we are all so infernally anxious to please the person we're talking to. We're smarmy, in a polite sort of way. I've seen it with all of us,—when we've been talking to Martyn. It isn't that we want to get anything out of him, but we want him to think what nice people we are; and that's the easiest way to do it,—we always take the easiest way.—If Martyn had of-

fered you a perfectly rotten job, you'd probably have accepted it just to please him at the moment. We're awfully condescending to the servants as long as they don't take any liberties; and to the parishioners and everybody. It's not only that it isn't, in one way, honest; it's so beastly flabby. We're always afraid of any unpleasantness, we're afraid of being criticised. I know what it is, we're afraid of losing our good opinion of ourselves."

He was so carried away by the sense he had of being definitely on the right track at last, that he stopped with an absurd idea that his brother must, now, agree with him.

But long before the tirade was finished, Edward had dismissed it as futile, so futile, indeed, that he could keep his temper in face of it and reply without heat. Nevertheless, he felt the necessity for sting in his reply.

"What it all comes to," he remarked, "is, that for some incomprehensible reason, you don't seem to realise the necessity for politeness."

"Not for politeness before any other possible consideration," amended Dickie.

That was his last shot. He had realised that he was speaking to an audience that could not understand him. And with the realisation came the thought that in society and politics, his audiences also would not understand him. He would be expected to conform to their habit of thought. He would have to appeal to them through their prejudices, as those local politicians had done. Martyn had told him that he was "horribly fundamental," and obviously that was a fault and a handicap. He ought to be content to accept the tradition and go on from that, build higher on the present edifice. And he would have done that, he told himself, if it had not been for the fact that whenever he had examined the old building he had found it faulty, even rotten. He was probably a blunderer and far too radical, but he was made that way, and he must go on with his examination of fundamentals, difficult as it was. There was that perplexing, perpetually confronting prob-

lem of religion, for instance, which was made responsible for so much authority. Adela, too, had doubts; he must talk to Adela.

"That is obviously absurd," was Edward's final answer to his brother's commentary.

"Don't you see, old chap," he went on, more tolerantly, "that it is absolutely essential to observe the convenances of society? This bull-in-the-china-shop business of yours doesn't do any good to yourself and upsets everybody else. It's a waste of energy. If every one were to adopt your methods, society couldn't go on. You remember what Bishop Magee said: that if we all observed the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, society couldn't exist for a week. Of course, he didn't mean that we shouldn't all try to observe them to the best of our ability; but we are absolutely bound to conform to a certain extent to—to social usages, you know. Can't you see that? Isn't it pretty obvious, I mean?"

Dickie sighed. "To a certain extent, I suppose," he admitted.

He felt that he had crossed some boundary that day. He was being driven into the necessity for a partial acceptance of standards that were accepted as universal by the people he mixed with. Even Bradshaw accepted them. Indeed, the only exception he could place was that of young Geach, the photographer; and his was not an example that Dickie wished to follow, although he had certainly admired a characteristic boldness in his general attitude.

This problem of expedience, like all the others, was most horribly complicated. There was, apparently, no straight, simple path. Right and wrong were not absolutes, they were merely relative. Had not Edward suggested that even the Sermon on the Mount was relative, and he most certainly believed the religion he preached, with an unwavering fidelity. . . .

Edward went to bed with a pleasant feeling of self-congratulation. He had kept his temper and he had finally had the best of the argument.

He spent a long time on his knees that night, praying for help to live a godly life and make his marriage a success. He prayed with intense earnestness, and with utter humiliation. Dickie might have thought that he was trying to please God by showing how perfectly sincere and humble he was.

Latimer, who shared his room at the inn, thought his brother was never coming to bed. Latimer had a secret, shameful opinion that Edward was a little overdoing it.

XI

Dickie went off to the Bank as usual next morning. He had been offered a half-holiday by Mr. Bell, but had refused it on the grounds that there would be nothing for him to do at home. If he might leave at a quarter to twelve for the day,—it was a Thursday and he would be leaving at two in any case,—that would suit him quite well.

“Very good, Lynneker,” Mr. Bell had said, and then had looked at him almost affectionately and added, “I think you’ll break our record by becoming the youngest manager in the service.”

Dickie had not replied to that suggestion, but the thought of it came back to him as he sat in the big nave of St. Peter’s, inattentively following the wedding service. He ought to have been sitting with his family in the chancel, but he had stayed to finish his books and had not arrived at the church until after the ceremony had begun.

The thought of his possible future as an official,—probably, in time, a high official,—of the City & County, arose from his recognition of the degrees that separated the congregation into three groups. His own family was not included; the members of it were set apart for this occasion; they were the entertainers without distinction of class. The congregation proper began at the front of the nave in line with the brass eagle of the lectern.

Those foremost, privileged seats were reserved for the

real aristocracy of Medborough and the neighbourhood. The Precincts were well represented. The Bishop's eldest daughter was there, sitting next to the Dean and his sister, backed up by quite an assemblage of minor dignitaries from canons in residence down to rural archdeacons, country rectors and curates. It was not only Lynneker prestige that brought this splendid crowd; many of its members were certainly followers of Mr. Leake. Sir Frederic Hope, for example, the Squire of Thrapley, whose absent-minded manner was often satirically commented upon by the Rector of Halton.

These first ranks, the elect of God and Society, were separated from the common crowd by a red cord stretched across the centre aisle.

Behind them came the smaller professions and the tradespeople; spotted by an occasional governess or upper servant. Between the middle classes and the final ruck stretched one stern forbidding trench of empty seats. And it was in one of these seats that Dickie had taken refuge despite the urgently whispered protestations of a verger, who was proud of his competent maintenance of this admirable arrangement for marking distinctions.

"You ought to be up in the chancel, Mr. Lynneker," he had insisted. "I can take you round by the vestry and pop you in at the back."

Dickie had smiled and firmly shaken his head.

His place, he thought, was in this second division. If he became a bank-manager, he would be the servant of this and the upper class. They would be his customers; it would be his duty to propitiate them; to be discreet without rudeness; to profess ignorance of the private affairs of his depositors; to have a bright, general knowledge of local politics while avoiding any idiosyncrasy in partisanship; to have at command an automatic, but not too hackneyed, set of clichés concerning the crops and the weather. . . . He would be a tradesman, wooing increased custom; and his efficiency would be measured by his success in that direction so long as he was the head of a provincial branch.

. . . By that and by his ability to gauge the solvency of applicants for an overdraft. . . . He might come in time to use that single measure of valuation in judging his fellow townsmen; estimating the worth of every man by the extent of his resources or credit. What other standard could he use, after twenty years' communion with ledgers and with the specie that gave a meaning to those inexhaustible permutations of the ten ciphers?

Up there at the altar rails the same traffic was going on. By concentrating his attention, he could distinguish the low drone of the marriage service and catch an occasional phrase. Edward and Helen were making a bargain before witnesses; and Edward's liability was the onus of supporting and cherishing his wife. He promised to endow her with all his worldly goods.

And yet by the Bank's standard Edward was a very small fish. Above the red cord, money was not the single touchstone. Nevertheless it counted. Old Spentwater, the timber-merchant, had found his way into the upper division, although he had never attempted to master his H's. Dickie had seen him whispering to Sir Frederic Hope, probably on a matter of business,—Sir Frederic's eldest son had been spending too much money and some of the fine old Thrapley oaks were being sacrificed,—but old Spentwater's equality, in some respects, was surely acknowledged by this intimate conversation during a religious ceremony. No doubt Sir Frederic was not too absent-minded to recognise the timber merchant when he met him in the streets of Medborough.

Dickie found that his father was giving an address from the altar rails. He tried to listen for a moment or two and then allowed his thoughts to wander again. The Rector was obviously greatly moved by the occasion. His strong musical voice was wavering. He would stop directly to recover his self-control. Dickie frowned and looked away. He had seen his father overcome in this way in the Halton pulpit, and the open display of emotion embarrassed and, in some way, annoyed him. He knew that his mother, also,

greatly disliked to see his father cry in the pulpit. It was strange that a man who was so reserved and apparently unemotional about his own more intimate affairs, should be unable to restrain this evidence of weakness in public. . . .

By an effort of attention Dickie returned to his musings on class distinctions in relation to his own future. Only one conclusion was quite clear to him: he was in a net that bore a trademark on every strand. He was harassed and bound and gagged with this delicate unbreakable stuff that was everywhere stamped with the detestable brand of "expediency." It had been woven by law and society and by countless generations of his ancestors; and he could never be free from it. . . .

The organist was magnificently pumping out the hopping jubilations of Mendelssohn's wedding-march. The bargain had been made good before God, and now the parties had also completed the civil contract in the vestry.

Dickie wondered if Helen were satisfied. It seemed to him that she was giving altogether too much. Even if Edward got the living of Thrapley—as he probably would, now,—and a minor canonry, he wouldn't have more than £500 a year. Whereas when old Leake died, Helen and her two sisters would have their father's big private fortune to divide. Edward was no catch apart from the fact that he was a Lynneker. For some inexplicable reason that seemed to count. . . .

For an instant Dickie found himself thinking of another aspect of Helen's bargain. Bradshaw, decent fellow as he was in most ways, had made a disgustingly coarse allusion that morning; and Dickie had snubbed him crushingly as was the duty of a Lynneker and a public-school boy. But now the thought returned to him without any suggestion of vulgarity. He dismissed it only because it came within that group of ideas which he had come to inhibit almost automatically. . . .

He found Martyn when the crowd came out of the vestry, and walked with him to the Vicarage.

"I want to ask you, Martyn," Dickie began, as soon as they were a little separated from the rest of the walking procession—the distance was so short that few carriages had been provided—"what do you gather was the origin of this separation of the classes?" And he explained the verger's classification.

Martyn shirked the issue with a whimsical smile. "The lot behind the empty line of seats," he said, in a confidential undertone, "have all got fleas, my dear old chap."

But later Dickie returned to that little evasive jest as to some shadow of the analogy he was seeking. The red cord was a mere pretext, marking an imaginary division; but as things were, it was, indeed, necessary to defend oneself by a gulf of empty pews against contact with the lowest grades.

They had fleas.

Once or twice during the wedding breakfast, Dickie furtively scratched himself.

XII

The speeches after the "breakfast" were reduced to a minimum. Edward and Helen had to catch the 2.45 train at the London & North-Western Station. They were going to the Lakes for their honeymoon. Helen, indeed, disappeared from the table before the speeches were finished.

When Dickie saw her again, she was wearing a close-fitting grey coat and skirt. He had thought she looked pretty in white satin, particularly in church when her contours had been softened by the fall of her veil. Now, she looked a little coarse, and extraordinarily solid. The bold curves of her figure might have been modelled in wood. And, once, in the hall, Dickie saw her put both hands to her waist and make a movement as if she were twisting her body within a tightly confining cage. He thought that that tweed dress must be very hot on a July afternoon. . . .

Edward had borne himself with a kind of earnest dignity

during the ceremony and the ordeal of the "breakfast." He had caught, temporarily, something of Martyn's air of cool self-assurance. But just at the last Dickie had a sight of some feeling that his brother had, perhaps, concealed under his assumption of gravity.

Helen was already seated in the brougham, and Edward stood hesitating, alone for one moment, between her and the group of their relations who were crowded upon the half-dozen wide steps that led up to the vicarage front door.

His wife put out her hand to him and touched his arm a little impatiently.

"Oh! come along, Ted, we shall certainly miss that train," she said, and her tone carried the suggestion of a command.

Dickie saw a flicker of irritation cross his brother's face; saw him withdraw his arm from his wife's touch with a compromised impatience that in some way mingled apology with reproof. He was smiling again as he closed the door of the brougham, but his attitude and expression still seemed to convey a faint hint of reluctance.

Dickie wondered if Edward would have evaded that marriage if he had not been tied by his devotion to expediency. What would come of it? Contentment, a relative success, the respect of just the group of people represented by these wedding guests; placidity among familiar interests; a sense of competence within the tiny circle of kindred attainment—any form of mild happiness; but no new knowledge, no struggle, no growth.

Would there be children? Quite absurdly, it seemed to Dickie impossible that Edward should have children. . . .

It appeared that Martyn was not returning to the Rectory. Dickie had left the house before the arrangement had been made. Some unexpected call had summoned his cousin to town, and he had brought his dressing case in with him and left it at the Great Northern Station.

Dickie walked down with him to catch the 3.30.

"You must let me hear from you occasionally," Martyn

said, as they went through the town. "That offer of mine is still open, you know. Possibly next spring . . ."

"If I needn't make up my mind for a month or two," Dickie submitted.

"Quite, quite; think it well over, by all means," Martyn agreed quickly.

"I'm tremendously grateful to you, you know," Dickie went on. "I hope you won't think I've been frightfully casual about it all. But it is an important thing to decide about, isn't it? I mean that I should have to stick to it if I took it on."

Martyn nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I imagine you would stick to anything you took up," he said.

They had to run when they came to the station approach, and Dickie rescued his cousin's bag from the cloak-room while Martyn took his ticket.

Dickie's last sight of Martyn was of a gravely approving smile seen through the window of a first-class smoking carriage; a smile that seemed to express the spirit of a well-mannered superficial agreement with any suggestion that Dickie might care to offer. Even Martyn's smile said "Quite." . . .

A faint air of exhaustion hung about the Rectory that evening, and Mrs. Lynneker gave a voice to the general spirit of reaction when, after supper, the arresting note of the tenor bell gave notice that a peal was to be rung in honour of Edward's marriage.

"Oh! dear, we're not going to have those dreadful bells?" she expostulated.

Eleanor looked up with cold reproof. "For Edward!" was her staid reminder of the eternal fitness of weddings and chimes.

Her mother sighed and puckered her forehead. "They're so—so desolating," she explained, "and after every one is gone . . ."

Aunt Mary, the one remaining visitor, smiled, and her bright eyes twinkled as she said, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, Catherine. Think of Edward and Helen!"

"Yes, they won't be able to hear the bells in Westmoreland," returned Mrs. Lynneker whimsically, as if that alone were sufficient to ensure the success of the honeymoon.

"Oh! dear, I agree with mother," Adela said, getting to her feet as the peal broke out. "I simply feel as if I couldn't stand them to-night."

"What nonsense!" murmured Eleanor, calmly absorbed in her sewing.

"All very well for you," retorted Adela. "You like making yourself miserable."

"Do I?" commented Eleanor, quietly, as her sister left the room.

Dickie got up and followed her. He had been waiting for an opportunity to be alone with her. He wanted to hear how she had come to share his doubts with regard to the Divine institution of the English Church.

"Shall we go for a walk?" he asked, as he came up with her in the hall.

"Oh! not to-night, Dickie," she said quickly. "I—I want to be alone."

"All serene," he agreed imperturbably. "But I should like to have a talk with you sometime about what you said the other night."

"Yes, of course, so should I," Adela returned. "Frightfully. But I'm not a bit in the mood, now. You don't think me a pig, do you?"

"Great Scott, no," Dickie said. "I shall go up and read a bit before prayers."

He came down at twenty to ten, and found that the whole party was still waiting for Adela.

"She has no business to go out alone at this time of night," the Rector was saying irritably.

"She can't have gone further than the garden," urged Mrs. Lynneker.

They all turned to Dickie when he came in. "Do you know where your sister is?" his father asked sharply.

"She went out, I think," Dickie said. "I've been upstairs, reading. Shall I go and find her?"

"I wish you would," the Rector replied.

But as Dickie reached the hall, Adela came in at the front door. Her face was flushed and she put up her hands and pressed them to her cheeks.

"Goodness, Dickie, have they had prayers?" she asked.

"They're waiting for you," he told her. "What on earth have you been doing?"

"I've been up at the top of the garden," she said. "I think I must have gone to sleep when the bells stopped. I say, Dickie, do I look very awful?"

"A bit flushed," he admitted, "and you look as if you'd been sitting on the grass. You're all over bits."

"I have," she said, and bent down and began eagerly to shake and brush the little brown particles from her skirt.

"I say, buck up," Dickie advised her. "The pater is fearfully ratty, now."

Dickie thought she carried it off very well when she came into the drawing-room. "I've been asleep under the elm at the top of the garden," she announced, "dreaming of fairies. So sorry."

She had a new air of self-confidence, as if she did not care, after all, what her father and mother and Eleanor thought of her.

"How flushed you are!" was Eleanor's quiet comment.

The Rector seemed almost to have forgotten his irritation.

"Well, well, ring the bell, Latimer," he said. "I'm sure every one must be very tired."

XI

ADELA

I

DICKIE'S talk with Adela developed spontaneously the following Sunday afternoon; after he had been "colared," as he put it, by Aunt Mary and taken into the drawing-room for a serious hour's conversation and Bible reading, while the rest of the family were at Sunday-school.

He came out, restless and perplexed, to find Adela in a deck-chair under the big apple-tree on the back lawn. He went to her at once and sat down on the grass at her feet. He was immensely relieved, just then, to find an opportunity for some expression of his own attitude.

"Look here, Adela," he began at once, "I must talk this out with you. I've been with Aunt Mary for an hour, and I feel like bursting. She's a jolly old sport in most ways, and I like her awfully; but when you get up against her religion she's like . . . I don't know . . . she's like that donkey we used to have when we were kids. Do you remember it?"

Adela said she remembered it very well. "Mother used to say it suffered from an *idée fixe*," she reminded him.

Dickie leaned back on the prop of his two hands and stared up into the apple-tree. "M—yes," he said. "It isn't, perhaps, a very good example. There's a lot more than that in this religious business."

Adela shut the bound volume of "The Quiver" that she had been reading and folded her hands on it. "What do you mean, exactly, Dick?" she asked. "How much do you believe?"

"Don't know that I believe anything," Dickie said with an air of starting free from prejudice.

"But you believe in *God*?" Adela returned with immense emphasis on her principal word.

"Which one?" Dickie asked, casually.

"But there is only One," gasped Adela.

"Dozens," was Dickie's caustic reply.

"But . . ."

"Well, Allah, for example."

"Oh! I see what you mean," Adela's tone expressed relief. "But that's only another Name."

"D'you think Aunt Mary would admit that?" asked Dickie. "Or the pater, or the mater, or Edward, or any of them? If they believe that why are they always collecting for the Church Missionary? No, it's no bally good, Adela; they say that the Mohammedan god is all a fraud, that he doesn't exist; and the Mohammedans say the same thing about ours. There isn't any almighty certainty that we're right any more than that they are. It just depends which god you're brought up on. It has been so jolly well drummed into us from the cradle that we take everything for granted. If you'd been brought up by Mohammedans, you'd be dead certain that you hadn't got a soul."

Adela frowned. "Well, then, what about the Bible?" she asked.

"What about the Koran?"

"I don't know anything about that," Adela returned impatiently. "But surely the Bible's true"; she hesitated and then gave away her own case by adding: "Most of it, anyway."

"Some of it's true, in a sense," Dickie said. "The Old Testament is a kind of garbled, romantic history of the Hebrews, you know. And they weren't much to boast about in the moral line, according to our ideas." He picked up a small green apple from the grass and split it open with his thumb nail. "Maggot," he remarked, and threw the pieces away. Then he looked up at the intent, rather

frightened face of his sister and went on, "I've got a sort of notion that the maggot in the Christian religion was theology, Addles."

She could not grapple with that. In this thing she was more fundamental than Dickie, himself. He had read, discursively but intelligently, and had come past the facts to the need for a more inclusive theory.

"But the New Testament?" she said.

"There's an awful lot of fake in it," Dickie explained. "The first of the gospels was probably St. Mark's, written a long time after Christ died, of course, and there's supposed to have been an earlier book called the Logia, made up of Christ's sayings." He paused and decided to drop that as too technical. "But the point is, you see, old girl," he summarised, "that the Bible, all of it, is only a collection of men's writings, just like any other collection, in some ways. There's a lot of good stuff in it, of course; but so there is in the Koran and the Vedas—in fact, there's an awful lot in Buddhism that's tremendously convincing," he concluded, glancing a little wistfully at the promise of that fascinating by-path.

Adela sat quite still and stared out through the reality of the sunlit garden; trying to make a new picture of a past that had never existed in the form she had always imagined. She saw the story of the New Testament as a series of steel engravings, and more particularly her attention was focussed on the "Descent from the Cross," and "Christ coming down from the Prætorium," framed copies of which hung in the Rectory dining-room.

"But Christ must have lived," she said, and saw quite distinctly the presentation of an effeminate Greek face with a thin beard, crowned by a symmetrically wrought coronet of thorn twigs.

"Quite probably," Dickie said. "Doesn't follow that he was the Son of God, though."

"But, Dickie," Adela persisted; "where do you get all this from?"

"Various sources," he told her. "I've got the run of the

Cathedral Library, you know. They keep it up better than you'd think, but hardly any one uses it, except for sermons. And I've picked up a lot of books second-hand. There's a chap called Ernest Renan, for instance. I've got four of his books upstairs,—they're in French, of course."

"Can you read French?" Adela asked, suddenly diverted by the interest of this unexpected fact.

"Fairly well," Dickie admitted. "Bell told me that French and German might be useful, and I've swatted at 'em—intermittently."

"But when do you get time to read all these things?" Adela's note of wonder grew more pronounced.

"I always get a couple of hours before breakfast, you know," Dickie said. "I've practically given up going down to the river, this year, and I try to make up another three hours at night. You can do a lot with five hours a day if you stick to it."

"But don't you get very tired?"

He shook his head. "Not a bit," he said. "I've wondered sometimes whether I can really count it as work; it'll all so interesting. I want to go on all the time, you see. It's often an effort to go to bed at twelve o'clock; only I've got an idea that I shan't be fresh at the Bank next day, if I don't."

"And you get up at six?"

"I always wake then," he said, as if that explained everything.

Adela gave the problem her earnest attention for a moment before she confessed her heredity and training by the announcement, "Of course, you'll break down if you go on like that. Nobody could stand it." It was certainly within her experience that no Lynneker could stand it.

"Well, I don't feel like it, at present," Dickie said, carelessly. "Sometimes at school, I used to think there was something wrong with me. I used to forget everything quite suddenly, in class. But I never get like that, now. It seems to make such a difference being interested in things. And I was an awful young ass when I was at Oakstone. I

didn't understand—Latin and Greek particularly. They're tremendously useful, really; but at school they seemed awful tosh, I don't know why—unless it was because I was such a blithering young idiot." He paused to reflect on that for a moment and then put it away as not worthy of further consideration.

"We seem to have got off the point a bit," he went on. "Let's go back to the last remark but one. You haven't explained a bit yet, you know, Adela, what it is exactly you do or don't believe in."

Adela recalled her attention to the problem of her religious beliefs by an effort. She had been greatly interested by the discovery of her brother's knowledge and powers of application. She was aware that he was supposed to be working in the evenings, but she had instinctively discounted the amount of reading he might be getting through at those times. She knew her family, and had taken them as the general standard of humanity. Here and there she had read of exceptional individuals with wonderful powers of mind; the kind of people, as she classified them, who became Bishops, or Premiers, or something. But she had distantly regarded these exceptions to the rule of humanity as creatures set apart; they were celebrities, not ordinary human beings. She could not picture them talking or thinking as she and her family talked or thought. And it was a shock to her to find her own intimate brother was capable of keeping fit on six hours' sleep and thirteen or fourteen hours' work out of the twenty-four. The study of this phenomenon was a personal and fascinating adventure; and she came back to the subject they had set out to discuss with the bored patience of a child brought in to continue its dull, mechanical lessons.

"I really hardly know," she said, knitting her forehead, and clasping her hands with an expression and gesture reminiscent of the school-room: "I've thought that some of it *couldn't* be true. Eternal punishment and things like that."

"Yes, that seemed pretty obvious to me," Dickie agreed.

"But then, surely, you've got to accept the whole boiling or nothing at all. If you once question a single point, you throw doubt on all the others. They all rest on the same authority. If you chuck one, you may as well chuck the rest. You've asserted your . . . well, your ability to judge."

"I suppose you have," Adela admitted. "But I do believe in God, Dickie. I feel sure there must be a God."

"Quite likely," returned Dickie. "The point is, do you believe in the Divinity of Christ?"

Adela gave that the consideration she would have given to a question in an examination paper. "Yes, I think I do," she said judicially.

"Why?"

She shook her head, a little embarrassed to confess that her lesson was not well learnt. "I feel like that," she said.

"You ought to read Renan's 'Life of Jesus,'" Dickie advised her. "You can read French, can't you?"

She blushed faintly as she said, "Oh! yes, of course. Will you lend it to me? I won't let any one else see it."

In her mind she was making a strenuous determination to "rub up" her French with the aid of a dictionary, and "really to work hard at that book of Dickie's." She wanted to show him that she, too, was capable of mental application. She saw that her task would be a very difficult one—she had all the flowers to see to, she had promised to sew the new cretonne covers for the drawing-room chairs, a certain amount of time must be given to the parish; there was her organ and piano practice to be kept up, and quite a heap of other things that could not be neglected. It seemed so much easier, somehow, for Dickie. But in spite of everything she made a solemn vow that she would find, at least, . . . two hours, yes, two hours a day for Renan.

"I'll begin after tea," she said; and then: "Don't let's talk about it any more, now. Wait till I've read that book. I wish you'd tell me what you want to be, Dickie. I should think you could easily become a bishop, if you wanted to."

She imagined that Dickie must necessarily be eager to discuss such a delightfully personal subject.

But he looked a trifle disappointed and said: "I don't know, yet, what I'm going to do when I leave the Bank. I'm not sure that I shan't stick on there for a bit. In any case, old girl, you may take it as a dead certainty that I shan't be a bishop."

He had hoped for some kind of a discussion that would give him a new point of view, and had found himself in the position of a tutor, giving instruction and setting his pupil a task. That did not help him. But no one ever had materially helped him unless it were Mr. Bell in the technicalities of banking, and already Mr. Bell was beginning, indirectly, to consult his junior's opinion. Dickie was consciously aware at that minute of a certain isolation he had hitherto hardly noticed. He had no contempt for other people's opinions, but they continually failed to provide him with the kind of knowledge he was more particularly seeking at that time. The fact of that failure was no sort of discouragement to him, but he made a mental note of it as a matter that might be worth his attention at some future time. Obviously it had a bearing on his relation to society in general. It occurred to him that he might be wanting in some quality of perception. . . .

"But, Dickie," Adela was saying in a beseeching tone, "I'm sure you could do something better than that rotten old Bank."

II

Every one remembered afterwards that Adela had been "a little odd,"—the phrase was Eleanor's,—during the three weeks that immediately followed Edward's marriage. She had been gentler, less selfish and more diligent. She had even taken to getting up at seven o'clock in order to go over to the church and practise the organ before breakfast. Such outstanding endeavours as that were remarked at

the time, the general attitude of being "a little odd," was recalled later.

Dickie, wondering a little, believed that the change he noticed in his sister was due to the absorption she was now showing in the pursuit of new knowledge. She was certainly persistent, if slow, in her study of Renan; and when opportunity offered and they could be safely alone, he talked to her, expounding rather than arguing the engaging topic; and occasionally he read Renan aloud to her, translating roughly as he read.

"It's good practice for me," he explained, and Adela, comparing her own halting efforts with his, was moved to fresh wonder at the ease of his accomplishment.

"You read it like English, Dickie," she said, paying him the sincerest compliment she could find.

Dickie pushed that away as waste of time. "Oh! *that's* easy enough," he said. "But, now, doesn't this make the *story* of Christ more understandable? Just as a possible story, I mean, and not as a sort of impossible miracle that couldn't happen again?"

Adela admitted that she was gaining admiration for Christ as a human teacher, even as she began to doubt the fable of His being the *only* Son of God.

But, chiefly, she was becoming more and more impressed with the qualities of her younger brother; although even in that period of docility she had her moments of reaction.

There was, for example, a certain Thursday afternoon when Dickie came home a little before three o'clock and she persuaded him to walk up with her to the Hanglands. She had packed bread and butter and cake and a bottle of milk in a basket, and used that as an argument.

"You needn't work for *one* afternoon," she said. "It'll do you good to have a walk, and besides, I want to get out. I feel sometimes as if I want more air," she explained and breathed deeply as if the air of the Rectory garden was too thin and exhausted for her needs.

"All serene, old girl," Dickie agreed.

She breathed deep again when they were up on the

wide expanses of the Common, but this time with an expression of relief.

"Don't you feel stifled at home sometimes?" she asked.

"Is anything up? Has there been a row?" Dickie said.

She shook her head passionately. "Oh! no," she returned with fervour. "I wish there had."

Dickie was puzzled, but not unsympathetic. "What's bothering you?" he asked. "Have we been talking too much religious history? Would you like to give it a rest for a bit?"

"No, it isn't that," she said, and threw back her head and made a gesture with her hands as if she were pushing away a whole ring of imaginary obstacles. "No, I like our talks about these things. They seem to be a way out."

"Out of what?" Dickie put in.

"Everything," she said vaguely. "Oh! everything at home seems so small and so not worth while. It's always the same, every day. And since we've begun to discuss things, it all seems so futile—prayers and church and all that—even my organ practice. I feel sometimes as if I must get up and shout at them that it's all bosh, that it isn't *true*."

"Hm!" commented Dickie thoughtfully, and then, after a moment's silence, he said: "It wouldn't be the least use, you know, Addles."

"I know it wouldn't," she said. "Only it would be such a relief. Just to do it and get it over."

"I wouldn't if I were you," Dickie advised her. "The mater and pater would be frightfully hurt. I've thought of it, too. I was pretty near it the night before Edward was married. But—it seems a rum thing to say—I'm not sure whether in a thing like that it's necessarily good to be honest. I know it's pretty rotten to go on shamming that one believes in their religion, but it would only be for one's own satisfaction if one went and said one didn't believe in the church and all that. It really would be an awful blow to the pater and mater and it couldn't possibly do them any good, could it?"

"Of course not," Adela said. "I didn't actually mean that I should ever do it. I only said I felt like it, sometimes. Good gracious! Life wouldn't be worth living afterwards. Eleanor would never give me a moment's peace; I should be prayed over and talked to from morning to night."

"Perhaps we'd better give Renan a rest," decided Dickie.

"But I don't want to," Adela persisted. . . .

Later in the afternoon, when they had had their picnic and were sitting in the woods, she displayed another mood.

"I suppose I *am* very selfish," she began suddenly.

"Every one is more or less, I suppose," Dickie said, helpfully.

"Yes, but I'm *more* and you're *less*," she confessed meekly. "How do you do it, Dickie?"

"Didn't know I did," he said. "Never think about it."

"You are an extraordinary person," Adela decided, after a thoughtful pause.

Dickie wasn't interested in that pronouncement. "What makes you think you're particularly selfish?" he asked. "I hadn't noticed it."

She gave him particulars, detailing a host of little omissions and personal indulgences; and the fluency of her catalogue proved her self-examination must have been exceedingly rigorous and recent, even if she had not concluded by saying with a sigh: "But I have tried to be better lately. I believe even Eleanor has noticed it."

"Why lately?" Dickie asked.

She blushed and put her hands up to her face. "I think our talks have made a difference," she said, and then hesitated and went on: "I've been thinking more about those things; and . . . and, Dickie, I want to ask you . . ."

"Well?"

"Would you forgive me whatever I did?"

He looked at her with a growing astonishment. "Good Lord, yes," he returned. "What are you trying to get at?"

"I think I should always come to you if I were in a real mess," she said.

"Have you been running up bills or something?" he asked.

"No! Oh! no; it's nothing," she said. "I was only thinking if there was anything that could ever put you against me. There isn't, is there?"

"I can't imagine anything," he told her.

She wanted to discuss Renan again on the way home, but Dickie refused. "You've had enough of that for a bit," he said, and told her stories of Bradshaw's peculiarities instead. "*He's* an extraordinary chap, if you like," was Dickie's summary. "I've told him he'd make no end of money if he went into the entertaining business, like Corney Grain, you know; but he's got the funniest kind of scruples about not using his appearance to make people laugh. I think he's really rather sensitive about it, at bottom; but when he's talking seriously to me, he says that he feels it's a sort of reflection on God to make fun of himself. He says God made him that way and he ought not to criticise Him."

Adela had quite recovered her usual spirits by the time they came to the big iron gates of the Rectory garden.

III

Since Latimer had come to a recognition of the observances necessary to one who was approaching deacon's orders, the Rector had had little cause for complaint with regard to the laxity of his children's attendance at morning prayers. Eleanor had always been punctual and Dickie had never had any excuse for being late—every one knew that he was up and dressed long before eight o'clock. Only Adela's occasional delinquencies remained as a cause for mild apologetic remonstrance from her mother. "Your father didn't say anything, but I could see he was vexed. He waited for two or three minutes and asked if you weren't coming," was a characteristic form of Mrs. Lynneker's reproof. And for the past few weeks, Adela, also,

had been scrupulously punctual; she had, indeed, so far improved her reputation that when she did not appear on the Wednesday following her walk with Dickie, Mr. Lynneker proceeded with prayers as a matter of course, without the least outward mark of vexation. One morning's absence in four weeks was a permissible irregularity.

The family had begun breakfast before any reference was made to the absentee.

"Why is Adela so late this morning?" her mother asked, addressing the table in general, in the tone of one who starts an agreeable conversation.

"She went out to her organ practice at seven," Eleanor replied with her usual gravity.

"She didn't put in a very good morning," interpolated Dickie. "I was reading upstairs with the window open, and I heard her begin, but she only played for about five minutes."

His innocent remark introduced a new mystery into the question of Adela's absence. Anything like an intriguing mystery was very rare at Halton, but the Lynnekers made the most of the scanty material at their command. It was an excitement to speculate on horrible possibilities with the safe knowledge that a simple, harmless explanation was almost certainly forthcoming.

Latimer, Eleanor and their mother took up that fascinating game now,—working themselves up into a state of half-alarmed credulity in awful possibilities,—possibilities that were made more excitingly probable by the fact that still Adela had not returned.

"You don't think anything can really have happened to her?" Mrs. Lynneker asked, at last, with genuine solicitude. This game of make-believe was being carried too far; it had begun to grow a little terrifying.

Latimer, however, had not yet reached the boundary of sincere apprehension.

"It's very funny," he said with an air of great gravity; "it's nearly nine o'clock."

"Oh! she's gone for a walk," put in Dickie, who had

taken no hand in the game of speculation. "And she hasn't got a watch," he added, as he prepared to leave the table.

His father looked up with a slightly perturbed frown. "Are you off, now, my boy?" he asked. "I wish you'd just run over to the church, first, and see if she's there."

"All right, pater," Dickie agreed, and went at once.

His going seemed to relieve the tension that was beginning to affect the nerves of his father and mother.

"Adela hasn't been quite herself, lately," Mrs. Lynneker said. "I think she ought to have a change of some sort."

Her husband unexpectedly agreed to the suggestion. "I had hoped that we might all get away," he said; "but I'm afraid that's hardly practicable." He looked at his wife. "You might take Eleanor and Adela to St. Edmunds for a fortnight," he suggested. "I might be able to get away for the middle of the week . . ."

They debated that plan for a minute or two, and settled upon it with a most unusual lack of consideration.

"Dickie's a very long time," Mrs. Lynneker said suddenly.

"Probably talking to Adela," the Rector suggested.

"Didn't you think she was rather funny last night?" asked Latimer.

"She's been a little odd for the last three weeks," put in Eleanor.

"Funny? Was she?" Mrs. Lynneker asked, replying to Latimer's question. "I don't think I noticed anything."

"So affectionate," explained Latimer.

The Rector pushed back his chair with a nervous gesture and his wife glanced at him with a quick, scared look, and put her hand to her heart. "What is it, dear?" she said.

Mr. Lynneker was leaning a little forward, his forehead on his hand. He pulled himself together when his wife spoke to him.

"I can't think that she . . ." he began.

"But what could she . . ." his wife echoed.

They all remembered, now, that Latimer was undoubtedly

right. Certainly Adela had been unusually affectionate the night before. But they could not guess what that show of feeling might portend. Undoubtedly there was grave cause for doubt and fear; but none of them had gone further in their speculations than some vague apprehension that "something must have happened to her,"—at worst a fainting fit as she sat at the organ.

With a movement that seemed concerted they all stood up and went to the window. They were just in time to see Dickie coming slowly along the drive.

He walked with his head down, staring thoughtfully at the gravel. He had a letter in his hand. When his mother called to him, he looked up quickly and began to run.

He did not reassure them when he came into the room. "She'd been to church," he said. "And she left this on the organ keys. It's for you, pater."

His father took the letter quietly, stared at it for a moment, and then moved away in the direction of his study. His wife looked round at her three children with a white, shocked face, and then hurried after him.

"What do you suppose she's done?" asked Latimer uneasily.

Dickie shrugged his shoulders. He was thinking that Adela had asked him whether he would forgive her whatever she did.

Eleanor was staring out of the window. There was no sign of forgiveness on her hard, pale face. She held her head erect for once as if her Lynneker pride had mastered for the time being her Christian humility.

"I suppose you know who it is?" she said.

Neither Latimer nor Dickie had the least idea.

"Who?" Latimer demanded sternly.

"Young Frank Oliver, the carpenter," Eleanor said, and she spoke the word "carpenter" with a bitter disgust that expressed her sense of final outrage.

Latimer was utterly incredulous. "Oh! rot, Eleanor," he expostulated. "Adela would never do a ghastly thing like that."

Eleanor's almost imperceptible movement of the eyebrows said plainly that she did not care what he thought. She had an air of being immensely withdrawn from any kind of intercourse with her brothers; as though she, alone, were able to understand the full tragedy of this awful morning, and was wrapt in the lonely pride of her contemplation.

Latimer hurled his protestations at a figure that apparently heard without attention. And then, suddenly, he saw that she was crying. She stood perfectly still, with an unmoved face, and let the tears well and run unnoticed down her cheeks. It was impossible to associate that strange, steady weeping with any tenderness for her sister. And yet wounded family pride was surely quite an insufficient explanation. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Lynneker were staying a long time in the Rector's study.

The housemaid came in half apologetically to clear the breakfast-table. She looked now and again with a curious interest at the three figures standing in the window.

"Well, it's time I was off," Dickie said.

"I'll come and see you start," Latimer responded.

Eleanor followed them out of the room as soon as the maid had taken her tray into the kitchen.

"I say, you don't believe that about that chap Oliver?" Latimer urged hopefully when he and Dickie were out of the house.

"I do," Dickie said. "I hope she'll be all right. He seemed a fairly decent chap."

"But, good God, Dickie," Latimer broke out fiercely. "He's an infernal carpenter." He became aware, then, that something ought to be done at once. "Perhaps it isn't too late to stop them," he said eagerly. "Where d'you suppose they've gone? Can't you go after them on your bicycle?"

"Oh! keep your wool on," returned Dickie roughly. "I'm going into Medborough anyway. They'd have to go there first."

Latimer had the satisfaction of seeing his brother ride

off with even more than his usual energy, and returned to the house, feeling that he had done something, at least, to avert calamity. He wanted, now, to be enormously active and foreseeing. He decided that if his father and mother were still closeted together in the study, he must go and interrupt them; that he must impress upon them the need for some immediate action—what, he was not quite certain. He paused to consider whether he would not give orders to have the horse put into the Stanhope; and then determined that he must see his father and mother first. The three of them ought to decide. . . . He went quickly back to the house.

IV

The flare of emotional revolt that had momentarily flickered into being during her walk with Dickie on the Common, had evidently been burning in Adela when she wrote that farewell note to her father. She had been defiant to the verge of hysteria; and her letter, hastily written in pencil, bore the marks of urgent haste.

And neither the Rector nor his wife was wise enough to guess that this desperate renunciation of family and creed could only have been the last of many attempts to frame some convincing defence of the writer's revolt from the placidity and sameness of rectory life. Without doubt she had burned intermittently with a consciousness of daring rectitude, had been overwhelmingly sure, ever and again, that she was gifted with a clearer vision of things as they are, than was ever possible for any member of her own family,—with the one glorious exception of Dickie. But the impossibility—she must have tried—of putting that defence of hers on paper, had unquestionably daunted her. She must have recognised the utter impregnability of the wall she wished to scale. How could she have set down any argument against their religion, when she had found it impossible to grasp the argument in her own mind? She had *felt* that Dickie was right; had vaguely seen a distant

light of relief that might guide her out of this muffled restraint. She could not formulate her reasons even to herself, and perhaps she was defiantly aware that she was prejudiced by her inclination. Yet, her other defence was so obviously hopeless. She could never explain her feelings for the handsome, rather overbearing young carpenter. She knew that her father did not like him, had said on more than one occasion that "that boy of Oliver's put on airs above his position." Edward and Latimer had both criticised young Oliver's "side." And she had been too proud to make any humiliating confession of love. She may have felt that she would have dishonoured her lover by excusing her passion for him. . . .

Her father and Latimer were outraged by that brief repudiation of their social and religious views; it stiffened them into a righteous anger that saved the Rector temporarily from any depth of grief. He was, for a time, almost too angry to be shocked; and the butt of his wrath was so simply the figure of young Frank Oliver that Adela was nearly forgotten.

For that morning, it appeared that atheism, revolution and all the crimes they begot were solely due to "educating the lower classes above their position." The Lynnekers were too old to brook this new rivalry of labour, but already the shadow of fear was falling upon them.

Latimer wanted to go at once and abuse young Oliver's father.

But the real hurt that stood between Adela and forgiveness, the injustice to the family that outweighed the hysterical asseverations of her farewell letter, lay in the fact that the scandal was all over the parish. The Lynnekers had been attacked and partly crippled. The slight that had been put upon them was no temporary hurt which might soon heal and be forgotten, but an ever open wound that they must perpetually carry for every villager to stare at and whisper about when their backs were turned.

No self-deception was possible for them from that first morning. Frank Oliver's father came to the Rectory back

door at eleven o'clock and humbly asked to see Mr. Lynneker. Latimer, suddenly aware of intense family feeling, changed his mind with regard to venting his passion in abuse, and vehemently shut the dining-room door to save his eyes from the pollution of seeing the old man cross the hall to the Rector's study.

Yet poor old Oliver was humble enough. There was no sign of the revolt of labour about him. He had sung an uncertain tenor in the choir for thirty years, and done odd jobs about the Rectory ever since he had gone into trousers.

He stood just inside the study door and fumbled his cap like an inexperienced criminal.

"I can't think what you and your wife can have been about, Oliver," the Rector said peevishly.

"We hadn't no idea, sir, what was goin' on," his daughter's future father-in-law explained. "Frank's been up in Liverpool the last three weeks. He's been talkin' of goin' to 'is brother in Canada for a long time past, and he told us as he was makin' arrangements." He hesitated and added by way of apology: "Mrs. Oliver and me was always against his goin'."

The Rector frowned and fidgeted. "But do you mean that—that you had no idea about—about your son and Miss Adela?"

Mr. Oliver was obviously confused. "A short while ago we had, sir," he mumbled. "But we thought it was all over and done with. We've spoken about it to Frank more'n once; but he was always very short with us, and we, somehow, never thought anything'd come of it."

What could the Rector say or do? He wanted most impatiently to be rid of the man, who stood there by the study door, furtively wiping his eyes with a dirty red handkerchief; the man who was crying not for any disgrace, but for the loss of his son.

"Well, well, Oliver, it's obvious that nothing can be done," Mr. Lynneker said on a note of dismissal.

The carpenter turned obediently, and then paused to say:

"Frank has spoken of our goin' out to him, sir,"—a possible consolation that in no way softened the Rector's present feelings towards his daughter.

Nevertheless it was not in the Lynneker blood to harbour a perpetual resentment against Adela. The strain was at least a century too old to maintain the stern, unforgiving attitude of romance. Even before Adela's second letter arrived from Liverpool they were beginning, a little inertly, to find excuses for her.

V

Edward and his wife came over to Halton the next day. They had returned from their honeymoon the night before, to find the dreadful news conveyed to them at the Vicarage by a note from Mrs. Lynneker. (For the next few months, at least, they were to live with Helen's father; her mother had been dead for ten years. The Vicarage was big enough to provide them with a completely separate suite of apartments; but Helen was to carry on all the housekeeping for a time. Her sister, Margery, was only nineteen.)

Edward was greatly shocked. He was not sure that this horrible scandal in his family might not spoil his chance of the Thrapley living; and the present incumbent had been confined to his bed for two years, and every one knew that the curate-in-charge was very unlikely to get preferment—for one thing, this was his first cure in the diocese. Moreover, Sir Frederic was a personal friend of the Vicar's. Edward had good cause for a resentment that he did his best to disguise.

Every one but the Rector was present that afternoon. He had recovered, now, from his first indignation, and was nursing in private the very real grief that had succeeded his immediate reaction to Adela's defiance. When his wife had gone to his study to tell him that Edward and Helen were in the drawing-room, she had found her husband bowed forward in his chair with his face in his hands.

He had shaken his head without looking up, when she had stammeringly made her announcement, and she had retreated at once, shutting the door behind her with the delicacy of one who leaves a sanctuary.

Something of awe still lingered in her face as she re-entered the drawing-room. "Your father's dreadfully upset," she said, in a hushed, mysterious voice. "I don't think he will come in this afternoon."

That statement gave Edward the suggestion he had been seeking, and he instantly grasped the opportunity to display the attitude that might properly be expected from him.

He got to his feet with a look of grave concern. "Shall I go to him, mater?" he asked, and there was a fine air of solicitude in his manner as he most unnecessarily led his mother back to the sofa.

"Better not, I think," she said. "He wants to be alone." She looked up gratefully at her eldest son; she was glad that he should show this concern for her and his father; but her own feeling with regard to Adela still remained in its first stage of utter perplexity. In her heart she had an immense sympathy with her daughter that she dared not proclaim.

"It's very hard on the pater," Edward said judicially. "Very hard, indeed; and on you, too, mother." He felt that the more tender form of address was called for, and made quite an effect by his use of it. He had taken up his stand on the hearth-rug and was prepared, now, with his sermon.

"Frightfully hard," mumbled Latimer, responding on behalf of the congregation.

Dickie, home early from the Bank, stared moodily out of the window. Eleanor still wore that hard, inattentive frown which set her apart from the others. Helen, having taken off her gloves and rolled them into an untidy ball, sat waiting with an air of resigned submission. It was evident that she would have many questions to ask, presently.

Edward had the situation in hand for the next few min-

utes. He tried very hard to be reasonable and decent about it.

"Of course, there's nothing to be done," he said. "We've simply got to wipe Adela out of our lives. I must confess that I can't understand what could have induced her to do a thing like that. It's perfectly incredible to me, putting aside altogether her impossible infatuation for a man of that class; it is, I think, perfectly incredible that she could have had such an utter lack of consideration for—for you, mother; and—and for the pater. She must have been mad, absolutely *mad*." The thought of Thrapley gave his voice an intense ring of conviction, and nearly diverted him from the admirable line he had taken. "What riles me . . ." he began, and then pulled himself up, clasping his hands behind his back. "There's simply no other explanation," he concluded tamely.

"I really don't think there is," came the dull response from Latimer's cantoris stall.

"We've simply got to put her out of our lives," Edward repeated, conscious that he had achieved no climax.

Even that judgment seemed to awaken no particular fervour among his audience. His mother still looked up at him with deliberate attention, as if she admired him greatly and was anxious to agree with him if she possibly could.

"What's he like?" put in Helen, suddenly; either because her patience was exhausted, or because she believed the sermon was concluded.

No one affected to misunderstand the reference. "Oh! a ghastly bounder," Edward replied impatiently. "Puts on no end of side."

"But to look at," persisted Helen, turning to her mother-in-law.

"He's certainly very good-looking," conceded Mrs. Lynneker.

"Oh! good Lord!" ejaculated Latimer.

"Yes, I know, but I want to understand," Helen said. "Hadn't you the least idea of what was going on?" she continued.

Mrs. Lynneker shook her head and compressed her lips.

"Hardly likely that we should suspect her of a thing like that," Latimer said superciliously. He was not going to be snubbed for nothing.

Mrs. Lynneker was wishing that she could have a quiet talk alone with her new daughter; they seemed to have a curiosity in common that could never be satisfied by this perpetual denunciation of young Oliver.

"She must have seen something in him . . ." she began weakly, and stopped, ashamed, at the murmur of protest she had evoked.

"Oh! mother," was Eleanor's reproach; her first contribution to the symposium.

And then the other silent member of the party claimed his right to a hearing.

He turned from the window with a look of rather disgusted resolution, as if he meant to perform a duty that was altogether distasteful to him.

"Is not this the carpenter's son?" he said, staring something contemptuously at his elder brother.

"Oh! my dear chap, that's absolutely a different thing in every way," Edward said. He was manifestly shocked at the profanity of the quotation. "Christ was the Son of God," he added reverently, giving the reference its proper context by his manner; and challenging his brother to complete his analogy by any suggestion of young Oliver's possibly Divine origin.

"Yes, you preach that," Dickie said, "and I suppose you preach, too,—every one does,—that he was born into that class as an example of humility. I don't know; I've always taken it to mean that we weren't to judge a man simply because he was a workman."

He had made them all uncomfortable, even his mother and Helen. He had been guilty of bad taste in dragging religion into the discussion. Religion was something to be practised according to certain rules; only non-conformists mixed it up with their every-day conversation. Aunt Mary

was a possible exception, but they deprecated too overt references, even in her case.

Edward shrugged his shoulders. "I don't think we need discuss that," he said contemptuously.

"But it's the whole point in this case," Dickie returned. "Don't you know that poor old Adela said in the letter she left that she didn't believe in Christianity any longer?"

"Yes, we heard that," Edward admitted, impatiently. "But really, I don't see that that . . ."

"You wouldn't," Dickie interrupted him. "You wouldn't see, either, that Adela had the originality to think things out for herself. But, great Scott," he continued with more energy, "can you wonder that she began to doubt if there was anything in your religion when you never dream of living up to it? That's a test for girls like Adela; you mayn't believe it, but it is. And she must have seen us at lots of times like this, when we'd put any other mortal consideration before the religious one. Young Oliver was a carpenter, and a jolly fine workman. You've got nothing in the world against him, morally; and if you believe one atom of what you preach every Sunday, it's jolly well your duty to be decent to him and Adela. If it isn't, the Sermon on the Mount is the most piffling rot that was ever preached." He paused for a moment and looked around at the embarrassed faces of his horrified family,—Mrs. Lynneker, alone, looked as if here, at last, was the solution of all her perplexities,—and then he turned to his sister-in-law and said: "Helen, can't you see that? Surely, you must see that there's no earthly good in a religion that won't *work*?"

She met his gaze with the first hint of a smile on her face, her mouth a little pursed, her eyes ready to twinkle. "But, surely, Dick," she said, "there must be some kind of limit."

"To forgiveness, for example?" he retorted.

The quotation needed no further pointing in that company; they all knew that the indefinitely large figure of "seventy times seven" was the prescribed limit. And as he

had no reasonable answer, Edward fell back on a pretence of insulted authority.

"If you're going to be rude to Helen, I think you had better leave the room," he said, and he stuck out his under lip and looked at Dickie with the threatening frown that had availed him in their school-days, when his six years' seniority was a solid argument that had given him the right to bully.

"Don't be a silly ass," Dickie returned calmly.

Edward's face was suffused with blood and he began to blink rapidly, as he said: "We all know you've got the manners of a labourer . . ."

But Eleanor abruptly stopped his childish abuse by saying: "And has our lack of religion upset *your* faith, too, Dick?" Her voice rang out, clear and sharp, above the spluttering anger of her brother.

"That and other things," Dickie said resolutely.

"You mean that you're an atheist?" Eleanor asked.

"That is what *you* would call me, no doubt," he agreed.

"And yet you dare to try and teach us our duty?"

The retort was quite illogical, but it cut the ground from under Dickie's feet because it questioned his power of judgment. If he were an "atheist," he was a criminal fool, and certainly negligible as a teacher.

Edward found an opportunity. "'The fool has said in his heart there is no God,'" he quoted pityingly. Surely, he thought, they had the young idiot, now. He had given himself away, hopelessly. Edward would not stand being called a "silly ass" in front of Helen. . . .

Dickie stood quite still. He looked from Eleanor to Edward and then threw a quick glance at Latimer, Helen and his mother.

"You are wrong by my standard and wrong by your own," he said. "Isn't that enough? Does it matter who says it? Call me anything you like; put me out of it altogether. I only want to know how you get out of that command to forgive your brother and your sister, young Oliver and Adela, unto seventy times seven." Then he

turned directly to Eleanor. "How do you excuse yourself?" he asked.

"I have never said that I can't forgive Adela," she returned quietly. "I *do* forgive her."

There was no sign of forgiveness on her set face; but she was prepared to do her duty by her religion; even to make acknowledgment of her forgiveness in public.

She returned Dickie's questioning stare for a few moments, resolutely, with an exalted determination of purpose; and then she got up quickly.

"I forgive them both," she said, with a little gasp as if her confession gave her some short, acute pain, "and I forgive you, Dick, for the dreadful things you've said, because I don't believe you can possibly be in earnest." She met his eyes again and saw there the doubt of her sincerity. "Oh! I do, I do," she repeated, raising her voice. "I forgive you all." She made a movement with her two arms as if she would raise them in a wide gesture of appeal to Heaven, and then dropped her hands to her side and walked to the door. They all watched her with a tense anxiety as she went out. She moved as if she were precariously upheld by a violent effort of will. It was a relief to hear her footsteps go more hurriedly down the passage, when she had closed the door behind her.

VI

An awkward silence followed Eleanor's departure. Mrs. Lynneker, at her end of the staid sofa, had buried her face in her hands. She might have been praying or weeping; she was certainly suffering some anguish of spirit. Helen was nervously picking at the buttons on her gloves. She wore an air of being absorbed in her own thoughts, but once or twice she glanced anxiously at her mother-in-law. Dickie had sat down on the little three-seated ottoman in the middle of the room. He was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, staring at the carpet and abstractedly ruffling his hair.

Edward and Latimer looked at each other with an expression that implied a deprecating shrug of the shoulders. Their sense of decency had been badly shocked. This polite family conclave had been turned into a "scene"; and they were not prepared with any nice formula of response. They had been conscious of an emotional thrill at the dramatic quality of Eleanor's reply to their brother's blundering and gaucherie, but their education and training stood between them and any frank expression of their feelings. They had no weapon but their knowledge of proper behaviour.

"Well," Edward began judicially, trying the effect of his voice on the silence; "well, I don't see that it's any use going on with this discussion."

"Not a bit of use," echoed Latimer.

"But you know, Ted, Dickie is quite right," Helen said, looking thoughtfully at the portrait of Gordon that hung over the piano.

Edward frowned irritably. "If you mean that we ought to forgive Adela," he said, "I am willing to agree; I don't think that I've ever said that we wouldn't."

"Got to forgive her as if you meant it; it's no good just *saying* you forgive her," grunted Dickie, without moving his position.

"I should like to know very much why you think you've got a right to teach us our duty," Edward returned with all the irony he could muster. He was determined not to lose his temper again.

Dickie sighed and sat up. "What a casuist you are, Edward," he said. "Why don't you face the question instead of trying to wriggle out on some side issue?"

"Yes, Ted, really you are," Helen agreed. "The point is, are we all prepared to forgive Adela from . . ." she flushed a little at the stiltedness of her phrase, "from the bottom of our hearts?"

Edward lifted his chin and stared at the opposite wall with a fine air of priestly reserve and judgment; he blinked rapidly, as if that were an aid to detached thought.

"I have never denied that we were prepared to forgive her," he said in his best voice.

"And Frank Oliver, of course," added Dickie.

Edward was obviously clenching his hands behind his back. He was being pushed into a very uncomfortable corner, and his only way of escape seemed to be in an admission of his sacred calling. And he wanted to maintain not only his dignity, but also an appearance of strength of character, before his wife. He must let her see that he was big enough to put his duty before any personal inclination.

"It may be a more difficult thing to do," he said in a muffled voice, "uncommonly difficult, but I admit that we ought to forgive young Oliver, too."

Latimer threw himself back into his chair with a gasp of impatience. "Oh! well, leave me out of it," he said.

Dickie glanced at him with a faint smile of relief. "You don't feel like forgiving him, Latimer?" he asked.

Latimer realised that in some way he did not quite understand he had pleased the common enemy. His bouleversement was unhappily too rapid. "No, old boy, I don't," he said. "Honestly now, do you?"

"I? Oh! Lord, yes," Dickie replied. "I don't feel like you do about it. If he's kind to Adela, and they're happy, I don't care a hang. If he isn't I'll go and break his confounded neck."

Edward sneered. "Is that your idea of Christianity?" he asked.

"No, it isn't," Dickie said; "but then, I suppose I'm not what you'd call a Christian. The point is, it seems to me, to be consistent. If you believe in it you ought to practise it."

Mrs. Lynneker had kept her face covered during all this conversation, but now she revealed the cause of the pain she had been suffering. She dropped her hands and stared at Dickie with an expression of anxious misery.

"Oh! Dick, you can't mean it," she implored him; "you can't mean that you don't believe."

He winced perceptibly. He knew that he was in the toils now. He had meant to avoid that admission of unbelief for a time in order to save his father and mother. For that he had been willing to sacrifice his personal pride, his consciousness of being open and honest. But the thing had been forced upon him. He had been characteristically unable to answer Eleanor's question with a bald lie.

"Don't take it like that, dear," he said, gently. "It's only that I've been reading and thinking a good deal about these things lately."

"Did you influence poor Adela?" put in Edward.

Dickie disregarded him. "And, mother," he continued, "I haven't said that I don't believe in God, you know. It's absurd really to call me an 'atheist,' but people like Eleanor don't understand any other word."

Mrs. Lynneker's fear lifted a little. She took no notice of Edward's commiserating gesture; he had stepped forward as if he would come over and comfort her. "But if you believe that," she began.

Dickie went and sat by her on the sofa and put his arm round her. "I think I do believe that," he said.

Helen's eyes were beginning to brim now. She was hastily searching in some recesses of her dress for a handkerchief.

Latimer got up and stuck his hands in his pockets, glanced out of the window, and then sauntered carelessly over to the door. He paused to adjust a photograph frame that stood on a cabinet of old china, as he passed out. He was conscious that he had missed his line on this occasion. He was persuading himself that they were all making "a most ghastly fuss about nothing." As he paced the back lawn and blew relieving clouds of smoke from his pipe, he was rather thankful to feel that he was still a man of the world, that he had still two months before he need finally accept the yoke of deacon's orders. That afternoon's discussion had certainly been rather illuminating. Young Dickie had "had" Edward badly . . . clever kid, young Dickie,—too bally self-opinionated, of course . . . and that

point about the necessity for forgiveness was incontrovertible, even by Edward's casuistry. Rather a good shot of Dickie's, that; it was true; Edward *was* a casuist—when you took orders, you signed away your liberty of thought. You undertook to believe and practise all the teachings of the church. You couldn't get away from that in theory; and if you tried a line of your own, you could be had every time as Edward had been this afternoon.

Latimer stopped in his walk and blew a balloon of smoke that hung for a moment, a pale phantasm seen against the solid green mass of the great elm at the top of the lawn, before it was caught in a thin draught of air and dispersed into nothingness.

But what was he going to *do*, if he didn't take orders?

VII

The little group left in the drawing-room was recovering its normal relations.

Mrs. Lynneker was almost cheerful again. She was holding Dickie's hand, a permissible sentimentality in that company, and had found courage, with his support, to say something of what was in her mind.

"I don't know what I should do if I lost you, too," she said, and then, realising that her intention had been slightly invidious, she looked across at her eldest son, and added: "And Edward is practically lost to me now."

Helen and her husband charmingly denied that, but when their little outburst of affection was over, Mrs. Lynneker returned to her point.

"I do feel that Dick is right about Adela and young Oliver," she began with a slightly forced steadiness. "And I believe your father will say so, too. It has been a dreadful blow to him."

"I suppose you don't know where they're going to live?" asked Helen.

"His father told us they were going to Canada," Mrs. Lynneker said. "Didn't I say that in my note?"

"No, you certainly didn't," Edward replied. He saw that this put quite a different aspect on the question of forgiveness. It might not be so difficult to find excuses for a carpenter's son when he was 3,000 miles or so away, on the other side of the Atlantic.

He sat down in his father's arm-chair and crossed his legs. He wanted to be very impartial and convincing; and he carefully avoided looking at Dickie as he said:

"What does he propose to do out there?"

"He has a brother in Canada," Mrs. Lynneker explained. "Don't you remember him? Harry Oliver, rather a nice young man, more diffident than Frank. I suppose that it must have been seven or eight years ago that he went,—perhaps you were at Cambridge. Your father preached a sort of farewell sermon."

"I believe I do remember hearing something about it," Edward admitted. "Anyway, I remember the boy, dimly. Have you heard how he's doing?"

"No, we haven't heard that. I must ask his father," Mrs. Lynneker said.

Edward shrank a little from this statement. He remembered that if his impossible brother-in-law had relieved the family of his presence, he had left his relations behind him. "You won't, of course. . . ." He began, and then stopped, conscious that his brother was watching him.

"Won't what?" asked Dickie.

"I mean that our . . . our relations with the Olivers will—will be a little difficult," Edward said.

"The old man was very nice this morning," his mother put in quickly. "He didn't attempt to presume in any way, you know. I can't help feeling very sorry for him and his wife. Your father told me that Oliver was crying this morning; they've only those two children, you see. Oliver said something about going out to join them."

"Yes, awfully sad for them in a way," muttered Edward.

"Poor old things," Helen remarked, with real feeling.

Edward had an inspiration. "Yes, it makes one feel that something ought to be done for them," he said. "Do you suppose the question of finding the passage-money is their real difficulty? I was only wondering if . . ."

"If their society wasn't more likely to suit Adela than it does us?" suggested Dickie.

"Her own choice," returned Edward patiently. The best way to treat this difficult young brother was to keep cool and to score whenever possible, he decided.

Dickie exhibited no consciousness of having been snubbed. "I don't suppose they've got fleas," he remarked thoughtfully.

"My dear!" his mother protested. Edward's lift of the eyebrows proclaimed the offence done to his fastidious sense of the niceties of conversation. Helen looked at her young brother-in-law with an interested smile.

"Why fleas, Dick?" she asked.

"Oh! I was just thinking," he said. "It was a distinction of Martyn's that seemed to work, in a way;" and he explained the verger's classification of the three estates.

"I know I must be fearfully muddle-headed about this social distinction business," he concluded. "I can't get it right in my own mind. I do feel as you do about it, generally. People like old Oliver *are* different from us in heaps of ways. But I can't see why they should be. When you come to think about it, it seems to be so largely a question of the way they talk,—and their manners—and washing."

"They're different in grain," Edward said. "I have had more experience of them than you have."

"But isn't it all a difference of education?" Dickie suggested.

Edward shook his head. "They're different in grain," he repeated. He thought the phrase was rather effective.

They could get no further towards an understanding. Dickie was wondering if he and his brothers were not in some incomprehensible way, also different in grain. There were points at which they could not meet. When he came

to talk to them about religion or this strange social problem, they came to positions at which no contact seemed possible. A curious metaphor came to his mind, a figure drawn from his study of physics. Perhaps the substance of thought had qualities more or less analogous to the qualities of matter. In certain relations he and his brothers could exchange ideas—their thoughts were impenetrable as solid matter is, and there was some clash of meeting and opposition, some friction of surfaces, some recognisable smoothing of opinions. But in other relations he could not touch their thought, nor could they touch his. His ideas seemed to pass through theirs without effecting any change, without actual contact; there was some kind of spiritual osmosis, in which the barrier opposed by his brothers' minds remained unchanged and immovable, and at the same time was quite ineffectual to stop the passage or alter the quality of his own thought.

VIII

Helen rather annoyed her husband that evening. They were alone in their own drawing-room after dinner (Halton dined in the middle of the day, but the Vicarage dined at eight), and she displayed a reprehensible interest in the subject of Dickie.

"He is a curious boy," she said. "But, Ted, I'm sure he's quite extraordinarily clever."

"Yes, I think he is," Edward agreed without interest. "I can't imagine where he gets that roughness of manner from. He's too impossible, sometimes. I didn't at all like the way he spoke to me this afternoon."

But Helen refused to be drawn, just then, into any admiring sympathy with her husband's peculiar delicacy of mind and habit.

"I rather like that roughness of his," she went on thoughtfully. "He's so—isn't 'drastic' the word I want? I mean he's so outspoken. It is such a relief to meet brave, honest people like that sometimes."

"I suppose you mean that *I'm* not," Edward said.

"I'm not comparing him with you, dear," Helen returned, gently, putting away from her the disloyal thought that her husband was somewhat apt to treat the universe as a setting for the jewel of his own personality.

Edward frowned. "Well, personally, that rudeness of Dickie's rather riles me," he said. "I can't see the particular advantages of being—coarse."

Helen sighed and stared at the fire-screen.

"Well, do you?" Edward persisted.

"I didn't think he was coarse," Helen said. "And you had to admit, yourself, that he was right about the necessity for forgiveness."

"Oh! well, I don't think we need discuss it all over again, now," Edward returned. He wanted to talk about the probabilities of his getting the Thrapley living and his chances of a minor canonry. There was nothing fresh to be said, but it was delightful to consider the possibility; and particularly delightful to take the most pessimistic view and to hear his wife's comforting assurances.

"I wonder if Sir Frederic came in to-day," he said after a decently long pause.

"Why?" asked Helen absently.

"I only wondered if there was any fresh news," he said, casually.

"Father would have been sure to have told us," she returned.

"I suppose he would."

Helen had set her lips into an expression that conveyed a slight air of stubbornness. For one moment Edward saw in her face a faint resemblance to his mother.

"I think I'd better go to my study and work for a bit," he said. "You don't seem in the mood for conversation."

"Very well, dear," she agreed. "I was thinking about Adela and Dickie."

Edward left the room, firmly determined that he would have this point out with his wife on some future occasion. What the point was he was not quite clear, but she had

certainly been wanting in consideration that evening. When he was in his study, he sat with a sheet of sermon paper before him, and found a dozen different excuses for his own attitude that afternoon. Indeed, he so completely exonerated himself that he almost went back to the drawing-room to state his case; and was only deterred by the contemplation of the spiritual energy that would be required of him. Nevertheless he was comforted by the reflection that his case was unimpeachable.

He had no idea that his father had begun his married life with much the same intentions, procrastinations and reserves.

IX

Adela's letter from Liverpool helped to soften the chief resentment she had left in the minds of her father and mother. The letter was addressed to Mrs. Lynneker this time, and the whole tone of it displayed an anxiety to obliterate the impression that might have been created by the hasty pencil note left on the manual of the organ.

Adela wanted to explain; she stated her want in those words; and it appeared that she would be perfectly happy, now, if she could but wipe away the impression she knew she must have left on their minds.

She came to that point at once, giving it precedence over the interesting facts which her mother was far more eager to have explained. Mrs. Lynneker did not actually skip that explanation, but she flutteringly looked ahead more than once, as if her patience could only be maintained by the knowledge that the important material was certainly coming later.

"Please forget that other letter," Adela wrote. *"I hardly knew what I was doing that morning."* She referred throughout to her yesterday, as to some remote period of her life. *"I did try to write properly and I just could not. Of course I did not mean a single thing I said in that other*

letter, but I felt that morning as if I never could make you understand."

The most comforting assurance among these repetitions was the implied denial of Adela's religious manifesto. Indeed, they came to find a peculiar solace in the thought of her original statement of unbelief. They inferred so much distress, so much anxiety and remorse from that original, terrible negation. "The poor child must have been nearly out of her mind," as Mrs. Lynneker explained.

The remainder of the long letter contained the valuable news that they had been waiting for; the account of her marriage by license before the Liverpool registrar—the family had never once doubted that young Oliver would marry her—and plans for the future. They were to live at Toronto where Harry Oliver was in business as a small contractor. "He used to be at *Peterborough*, in Canada, not far from Toronto," she commented. "Isn't it funny? Fancy my still being so near Peterboro'!" They were going by steamer from Liverpool up the St. Lawrence to Montreal and thence by train; and as they were not sailing until Saturday, there would be just time for Adela to receive a letter of forgiveness from the Rectory. And at the end she displayed a note of anxiety concerning the expectation of that mark of forgiveness. After the comparative jubilation of tone displayed in the recital of her prospects, the faint wistfulness of the close was a little pathetic. When the letter was read, aloud, the Rector showed again signs of emotion at that final appeal.

There could be no question now of the family's willingness to forgive her, despite the bitterness of one or two casual allusions that showed how quickly Adela had accommodated herself to her new conditions. The references to "Frank" and the whole-hearted admission, no longer disguised, that he "was all the world to her," could be understood in the circumstances; but the allusion in one place to "Harry" and the expression of a sincere hope that Frank's father and mother would presently join their children in Toronto, seemed to imply a willing admission of

her new social status that made the Lynnekers frown uneasily.

Dickie had plenty of material for thought in his survey of this intimate presentation of social differences. He saw clearly that if his father and mother were ready, even anxious, to forgive Adela, they were by no means prepared to accept the Olivers as relations. He had not seen either his father's or his mother's letter to Adela, but he gathered that they contained little explicit reproach. The fact that she was going "all those thousands of miles" away from them—Mrs. Lynneker frequently repeated that awful measure of distance with a scared concern—was a sufficient reason for a thorough setting in order of the house of charity. She might never come back, and how many suns might have gone down upon their wrath before some probable tragedy made restitution impossible. Edward and Latimer were included as conforming to the same attitude. But what puzzled Dickie was his wonder as to what was, now, their real feeling towards Adela. The four persons concerned might differ in various degrees, but he could not avoid the conclusion that if they were all unequal to the effort of any positive dislike—a thing that irritated and chafed them, producing the fret that arose from the consciousness of active antagonism—they had no longer any feeling towards Adela that could be properly described as love. She was no longer playing on their side. In brief effervescencies of emotion they might remember her as one of themselves, and possibly long to see her again. But, in effect, she had climbed the ring-fence that separated the Lynnekers and their own kind from all the rest of the world. She could never hope again to find a place within that enclosure.

Eleanor remained in a separate category. As she had been the first to profess forgiveness for her sister, so would she be the last to experience,—if she could ever experience,—any transient emotion during which she might momentarily recover a measure of her old feeling. Possibly she had never felt any love for Adela? Dickie frankly ad-

mitted to himself that he could not understand Eleanor. He was quite unable to realise the motive of jealousy which had tortured her; jealousy, not of the man her sister had so disgracefully chosen, but of her youth and independence, and, though Eleanor might not admit it, of her sister's success. Adela, indeed, had succeeded in an ambition that, however bitterly Eleanor might deny it even in her lonely communications with God, was instinctively her own. She was nearly twenty-eight, she had no charm of personality, she had never attempted to attract a man's desire by any deliberate snare of femininity. But deep within her was a bitter rage against any woman who succeeded where she herself had failed. She professed a faintly disgusted tolerance for small babies; she would have been shocked and repelled by any overture of Frank Oliver's; but subconsciously she envied Adela. And the brief intimation of her own feelings had so hurt and hardened her that she was, as yet, incapable of finding any "relief" in the fact that Adela had been permanently removed from Halton. For Eleanor's jealousy had not begun with her sister's inexplicable surrender to the son of the village carpenter. . . .

And mingled with all this foolish muddle of class distinctions, Dickie was intrigued by the problem of his own religious professions.

He was sorry, now, that he had ever spoken to Adela. He felt that he had blundered, again, in giving her a false courage that had enabled her to dare the ultimate rupture with her familiar life. For he doubted if that marriage of hers would be a success. He had given his three reasons in the drawing-room as speech, manners and washing. He remembered the look of Frank Oliver's hands after he had been French-polishing; and recalled also the ugly nails and permanent callosities that were the mark of his breed and his trade.

In a few weeks those things would come to be a vexation to Adela; and, very uneasily, Dickie presently came to wonder whether Edward had not been justified in assert-

ing that between the Lynnekers and the Olivers there was a difference in grain. And Frank Oliver was a masterful man. Adela would never break him, though he might break her. That, certainly, was a solution, but Dickie intensely disliked the idea that Adela's spirit would be broken.

Then he had to admit that if he had done badly in influencing Adela's religious beliefs, he would probably do worse by any profession of what they would irrevocably call "atheism" to his father and mother, or his brothers, or Eleanor. As Adela had said, they would never give him "a moment's peace. He would be talked to and prayed over from morning to night." They had the persistence for that. They were so serenely confident in their knowledge of an omnipotent backing.

He was not afraid of that struggle; but he was coming to a realisation that, strong as he might be, the world of his society in the mass was stronger still. And he had no mission to preach to them; he would seriously disturb the happiness of his father and mother, without achieving any purpose save a doubtful consciousness of his own integrity.

Over all these problems there hung the doubt of motive. He felt that if the motive were unselfish, almost any action might be justified. Just so had he been justified in his prosecution of Smith, the money-lender; whereas Atcherley and Geach cast a slur on the same action by their dishonesty and self-seeking.

And could he defend the unselfishness of his own motive in this desire to proclaim himself free of the restrictions that he believed the Christian religion imposed upon his liberty of thought? He thought not. The injury to his family might outweigh his own gain.

Nevertheless, even as he decided,—a decision from which he would not turn back,—that he would continue to profess a decent subservience to the rule of the church, some spirit within him sighed with a long regret. He had begun to settle himself less rebelliously within the shackles of the net, every strand of which was marked with the brand of "expediency."

XII

BRIAN LESSING

I

ADELA'S disgraceful elopement left a deep score on the Halton system of chronology. The record of Edward's marriage declined by comparison to the value of a common incident. It had been foreseen and prepared for, and he had so long been associated with St. Peter's and the Vicarage, that the mere establishment of his relations with Helen hardly counted as an event. But if the ceremony was in itself of small moment, it had a particular use as a synonym. The Lynnekers, as a family, did not speak of the gross red line that had been ruled across its historical chart. When they looked back for some bold indication to date a memory, they ran, as it were, a hurrying finger over the disfigurement, a finger that afterwards hesitated and stopped inevitably at the pale entry of Edward's wedding.

"Oh! don't you remember," was the family's form, "that was before—before Edward was married in the summer of '95?"

And the Rector and his wife would sigh thoughtfully and then admit that they recognised the validity of the mnemonic. As an aid to memory the triumphant return of the Salisbury administration was quite overshadowed.

Adela was forgiven; they had written to her; they were ready to speak kindly of her among themselves. But she had disgraced them; and they hoped she and Frank Oliver (they avoided speaking of him as "Adela's husband") would remain in Canada.

Within the family circle there were many variations of mood. On certain days it was unwise to approach any reference to Adela in the Rector's hearing, for fear the allusion might provoke that nervous irritability which was increasing with his years. On other days he would speak of her, himself,—probably as our “poor, little Adela”—and display, perhaps, a slightly maudlin tenderness over some recollection of her youth. But to the world at large, even to that select circle of Lynneker equals within the ring-fence, the family were a shade more distant than they had been. Strangers who could not understand that defensive attitude, were apt to exaggerate Helen's original criticism, the mild verdict delivered to Dickie in the stable-yard, that the Lynnekers were “a wee bit supercilious,” that they “rather kept their noses in the air.”

And yet they contrived through it all to maintain their tendency to conciliation. Even as they hardened themselves against the attacks of imagined gossip, they were willing and ready to please. Indeed, that added touch of hauteur may only have been an attempt to bear themselves conformably among their equals; an attempt to conciliate the opinion of society by proving that as a family they remained superior to the offence of a single member.

II

And seven months later, that is to say in the early spring of 1896, they had to face yet another trouble that was certainly less outrageous than the last, but cast a further slur on the Lynneker reputation.

Latimer had publicly announced his engagement to Mrs. Blackwell, a widow fourteen years his senior.

To Halton there was something a little unseemly in the contemplation of that marriage apart from all other considerations. The Rector had fidgeted and frowned when, four years before, his eldest son had shown an inclination to pay attention to the same lady. He had told Mrs. Lynne-

ker that he did not like the idea of so great a disparity of age, on the wrong side, between husband and wife. And it was also evident that he did not like Mrs. Blackwell.

She was a dark, handsome woman, growing steadily stouter as she aged, who had come to live in Medborough in the year of the first Jubilee. She had been regarded suspiciously at the outset by that inner circle of the Precincts which it soon became manifest she was intently propitiating. The Precincts had at first looked down superciliously at her big house in the Thrapley Road, just outside the town; on her well-kept gardens and her victoria with the two well-matched bays. No doubt, Mrs. Blackwell was rich, but she might prove to be, also, ostentatious and vulgar. She had come to Medborough without social introductions, and the Precincts decided to wait.

They waited for two years; and in all that time Mrs. Blackwell was not guilty of a single faux pas. She was called upon by the second grade of Medborough society, led by such lesser clergy as the Principal of the Training College and the senior assistant master of the King's School. But she treated all these callers with an admirable restraint. She was rude to none of them, but she kept them at a distance. She showed the Cathedral party very plainly that she had no intention of being leader in any second-class puddle.

She first gained admission to the Close through old Folliett, the solicitor, the third son of Dr. Folliett who had held the Bishopric of Medborough from 1829 to 1843. Old Folliett,—he had one son in his own office and two in the church, one was an archdeacon and the other a missionary in China,—was esteemed and trusted as an arbiter of social distinctions, and when he invited Mrs. Blackwell to dinner, the Precincts began to consider the advisability of leaving cards in the Thrapley Road. At first they displayed a little human concern lest old Folliett should be tempted to marry again. Mrs. Blackwell was only thirty at that time, and unquestionably handsome in her striking way.

And yet, although Mrs. Blackwell had so bravely fought her way up to and at last through the Palace gates—not to a mere diocesan function but to a social luncheon party—the Precincts had never been quite easy about her. They had shown signs of alienation when Edward's brief affection was near its crisis, and on one or two other occasions their fastidious sense of an ultimate propriety had been a little vexed. They knew so little about her previous life, and she gave no confidences. No one knew anything about her late husband, no one knew what her father had been. Even the fact that she was a mistress of the French and Italian languages was regarded with a shade of suspicion. (The Bishop's wife's French was simply abominable.) And why did she spend three months of every year in Italy? She had never complained of delicate health.

The fine conservatism of the Precincts was intermittently fretted by the admission of Mrs. Blackwell.

And they could not sanction her engagement to young Latimer Lynneker, a mere boy of twenty-three, fresh to deacon's orders.

This clear mandate coming with such high sanction cast a deeper slur on the engagement; the Lynnekers were conscious of new disgrace, before they had had opportunity to live down the old one. And there was yet another reason for regarding the affair with the strongest disapproval.

Mrs. Blackwell had bought the advowson of Culver.

No one at Halton, with the exception of Latimer, had known that the living was likely to come into the market. They had known that Canon Lynneker's two eldest boys had been a great expense to him; and that only the third son, Richard, who had taken orders and had a curacy in Birmingham, was definitely earning his own living. But Culver was worth eight hundred a year, and the Canon's financial difficulties had never been taken seriously.

It was distinctly unpleasant to hear that the gift of the living had passed out of the family, but it was even more

unpleasant to face the suspicion that Latimer had been acting meanly and even disgracefully. He had been helping his uncle in the parish since January, and the whole bargain wore an aspect of double-dealing (why had he never said a word to Halton till the thing was done?), and what was worse, of a quite unworthy trafficking with sacred affairs; with the cure of souls in Culver (395 at the last census) and with the divine institution of marriage. It was impossible to avoid the inference that Mrs. Blackwell had bought Latimer and that he was willing to be bought. Certainly, the Precincts would make no effort to avoid that inference when the bargain of Culver became public property.

The Rector of Halton was beginning to feel that the Lynnekers had fallen on evil days. He was in his seventieth year, and his zest in life was steadily failing. Physically the Lynnekers were a tough and wiry stock, but when they lost their appreciation of life, they were apt to decline rather rapidly.

In the early summer of that year, the Rector was become increasingly anxious that Dickie should leave the Bank and become a credit to the family.

Dickie was the last anchor that saved the old boat from drifting out with the ebb.

III

Martyn's offer was, theoretically, still open.

He had written a very delicate letter to his uncle after the affaire Oliver, a letter that had made the most tactful references to the scandal, and had underlined Martyn's nice sense of the family's superiority to any transient disgrace, by restating his willingness to do all that he had suggested for Dickie. "Of course, little Adela's curious elopement in no way affects our plans for Dick," had been his phrase. "I am still awaiting that explanation he promised me," he had added.

Halton was greatly exhilarated by that letter. The Rector had read it to his wife and Eleanor in the middle of the morning; and they both agreed with his description of Martyn as "a charming fellow." Also, they all decided, in conclave, that Dickie's reply must be supervised by themselves. Dick was so "impetuous," his father said.

Latimer, whose diligent morning study for orders had not been interrupted, even to hear the heartening news, declared at dinner that he would personally superintend, and might possibly draft, Dickie's answer. "Pig-headed," was the adjective he found for his brother, a description that was accepted with little less reserve than the Rector's "impetuous" had been. Either adjective seemed to fit well enough at the time, although taken together they might have been judged to lack consonance.

The four of them were almost united in their attack upon Dickie at supper, and Latimer was so far emboldened by the support of the flock that he actually put his morning's proposition into words.

"Look here, Dick, will you let me rough out an answer?" he asked.

The pig-headed, impetuous Dickie grinned as if his brother's suggestion amused him.

"Will you be able to explain exactly what I feel about being a barrister and standing for Parliament and all that?" he returned.

"My dear chap," Latimer said, "if you take my advice, you won't say a word about your opinions."

"I hardly think it necessary, in the first instance," the Rector put in gravely.

And Mrs. Lynneker added, albeit with a shade of doubt on her face, "*Must* you go into all that, dear? You know you might so easily change your mind afterwards."

"I should have thought you could try it and see, in any case," was Eleanor's contribution.

Dickie put his elbows on the table and stared past them all, trying to visualise, not the problem of what he should say to Martyn, but that of the impossibility of getting any

kind of reaction to his idea from his family. They knew he was not a fool, and yet they never attempted to understand him.

"Would it be fair to Martyn," he asked, "if I let him spend money on me and then decided that I couldn't go on with the thing?"

Latimer snorted. "You'd jolly well *have* to go on," he said.

"That's what I feel," Dickie replied. "And you see, I don't feel inclined to pledge myself to that extent."

"It isn't only yourself that you have to consider," put in Eleanor.

"But what is it precisely, Dick, that you're afraid of?" his father asked.

"I don't want to be forced into one particular line of thought," he said.

"What rot!" mumbled Latimer, and Dickie could not doubt that however various might be the expression of conviction, his brother had given a shape to the beliefs of his family. For them, in religion, in politics, at the back of all their social judgments, there was but one line of thought worthy of acceptance; the others were tainted by those detestable spirits of "atheism" and radicalism.

"Really, I can't understand your difficulty," his father was saying, peevishly.

His mother looked disturbed and grieved. She was manifestly afraid that the Devil had been busy again, tempting her son with doubts of the great, eternal truths—"a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets" was a quotation that hung vaguely in her mind.

Latimer preferred to keep to the safer ground of political life. "Do you propose to become a radical; or a socialist, perhaps?" he asked, as if he would tempt his brother into the confession of some absurdity.

"I don't know, yet, you see," explained Dickie.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Latimer. (He had dropped his favourite "Good Lord!" as slightly irreverent for one so soon to be ordained deacon.)

The Rector leaned back in his chair with a sigh of despair.

"But my dear boy . . ." he expostulated.

Dickie realised that he must be a great trial to his family. He could begin no argument, no explanation of his own attitude without challenging some fixed, inalterable principle that dominated the very character of their minds. And he saw that he faced the same crisis which had threatened him when he was compelled to abate something of his honest intention in the matter of his religious doubts. Now, again, his choice lay between sincerity and some sacrifice of his own conscience for the sake of his father and mother. They could not understand his doubts, whether religious or sociological; they could not appreciate the radical quality of his desire to understand the meaning and reason of life. There was some difference of fibre between his mind and theirs. They accepted, he questioned. But he questioned, as he believed, with good cause and not from any foolish tendency to upset for the sake of upsetting. Indeed, he had had little wish to impress his own opinions on other minds; he was too doubtful of the validity of his deductions. If he had found any satisfaction in his family's theory of life, he would gladly have accepted it. But the more he examined it, the more clearly he saw that their theory did not work. It was a ready-made answer like the misprint in Latimer's algebra key; and by no juggling of figures could it be forced to satisfy the equation. They had all so placidly accepted the printed answer. It was an answer that suited their temper, and now they would defend its accuracy with an utter conviction of its absolute truth. As he looked across at his brother, Dickie felt inclined to repeat his old assertion and say: "But 19 won't work, Latimer."

The alternative was to admit a second time the necessity for some measure of compromise.

"Well, it isn't much good trying to discuss my political opinions when I haven't got any," he said. "Let's get back to the question of what I'm to say to cousin Martyn."

He looked at Latimer as he spoke and it was his brother who answered on behalf of the family.

"Exactly. And if you haven't got any political opinions, I don't quite see why you shouldn't accept his offer without all sort of idiotic quibbles and objections. We've always been conservatives,—as a family, I mean. Isn't conservatism good enough for you, or what?"

"It seems to me so horribly prejudiced," Dickie said.

"Prejudiced? In what way?" his father asked sharply.

Dickie turned his head and looked at him, with that steady, honest gaze of his which was so exceedingly disconcerting. The Lynnekers could never argue without the stimulus of losing their tempers, and Dickie's calm dialectic gave them a sense of inferiority.

"Well, I'm sorry, pater," he said, trying to be particularly clear and reasonable, "but I can't see, for instance, why you're so frightfully down on Gladstone . . ."

He would have gone on to explain his reasons for that opinion, but no opportunity was allowed him. In one sentence he had denied all those eternal verities which constituted the faith and profession of his family.

The Rector pushed back his chair with the same gesture of finality with which Edward had upset the salt.

"Upon my soul, Dick, I've no patience with you," he said, and left the room.

Mrs. Lynneker sighed. Eleanor's thin mouth was set in an expression that summarised twenty generations of Lynneker disapproval. Latimer shrugged his shoulders and almost imperceptibly tossed his head; he did not speak, but every line of him was calling the universe to witness that Dickie was "a young ass."

IV

Dickie went up to his own room, and sat down to write his letter to Martyn. He had intended to be very clear in his presentation of the whole question; to explain his

position and leave it to his cousin to decide whether he would venture upon the task of training him for a profession he might subsequently refuse to pursue.

But when he began to write, he found a sense of pleasure and relief in stating all those things his father would never allow him to say in words.

"You see, Martyn," he wrote, when he got into his swing after a rather stilted opening, "I can't believe that there is any absolute answer to this particular question of whether we should be a Radical or a Conservative, any more than I can believe that one religious sect is necessarily absolutely right and all the others wrong. Of course, you will say that it is more expedient for me to become a Conservative, but that would mean just shutting off half my mind and ideas, and I'm not willing to do that. I don't suppose I shall ever learn a thousandth part of the whole truth about what we are and what our work ought to be; no one ever has, I suppose, or else we should be more in agreement about fundamental facts. But what I won't do is to throw in my lot with one limited set of opinions, and be prepared to swear blind that any one who doesn't agree with me is the most infernal blackguard and traitor that was ever born. That really isn't much of an exaggeration. I don't know much about politics, but it seems pretty obvious that the principal game is to slang the other side for all your worth, if you want to make any impression.

Well, that isn't a bit my line, you know; but, as I've just said, I'm fearfully ignorant about these things, and I dare-say if you and I could have a long talk, you might be able to show me some way out of this initial difficulty. I have no objection to politics qua politics, you understand, but I feel pretty sure that if I went in for them, I should have to follow a line of my own; and the point is whether you would care to take me on, on those terms.

The pater and mater and Latimer and Eleanor all want me to write and just accept your offer on your own terms; but I'm sure you would not want me to do that, and even

if I did, I couldn't keep it up for half a week after I was in town. Do you care to take the risk I mentioned? I notice that I haven't once said how jolly good it was of you to make the offer at all, but you will take that for granted, won't you, I mean how grateful I am.

My people wanted me to talk this letter over with them, but I couldn't very well do that. You know I quite understand their position in a way. They have always been brought up to believe in the church and the Conservative party, and they are quite convinced that they are right about them; and I think they are up to a point. I can see that it would make them miserable and do no kind of good if I were able (which I certainly am not) to shake their faith in these things. I don't want to do that; I only want to understand (to a certain extent, of course) how things work, if you know what I mean . . ."

Down in the drawing-room, the Rector after an impatient moment of delay,—the two maids were standing reverently expectant before their usual seats,—asked his wife if Dick were coming down to prayers.

"I haven't seen him since supper," she said defensively, as if she had been accused of being privy to her son's absence.

"Sulking, I suppose," murmured Latimer.

"Shall I call him, sir?" asked the housemaid.

The Rector shook his head. "You can shut the door," he said.

He was aware of a feeling of loneliness. He looked up at the engraving of Gordon and chose the hymn. "Abide with me," he said. They all knew the number.

v

Dickie's general conduct in connexion with the letter to Martyn seemed to justify either his father's or his brother's adjective impartially.

Latimer maintained that pigheadedness alone could ac-

count for Dickie's treatment of the situation. The young idiot had refused the help of his seniors and written and posted his letter without showing it to a single member of his family, any one of whom, presumably, could have given him very sound and useful advice.

Mr. Lynneker, as soon as he had recovered from the shock to his political sensibilities, found an excuse for all his boy's vagaries in the thought of the word "impetuous." Much might be forgiven on that score. The boy was unquestionably clever and he was not yet twenty-one. Youth was apt to be misled by its own abilities. He would settle down as he gathered experience.

And the reply from Martyn that came a week later largely vindicated Dickie's conduct of the affair by proving that his admirable cousin had not, as yet, been offended.

The offer was still open, although "unhappily somewhat deferred," as Martyn explained. He was going out, with a returning consul, to Japan in the following January, he told them, and might be away for six months or even longer. His own object was in no sense political and it was still possible that he might change his mind, but he had always had a curious interest in Japan, and his friend's suggestion that they should take the voyage together had at last turned the balance in favour of making the effort. The effort, he added, was due to the fact that he was a horribly bad sailor, but he was afraid that if he waited until the Russian railway was built, he might never go at all. He made little direct reference to the matter of Dickie's letter, but the tone of his reply hinted that he anticipated no difficulties in coming to an amicable arrangement with regard to his young cousin's "critical views on political methods," a hint that endorsed the Rector's opinion with regard to Dickie's probable growth towards orthodoxy. Without doubt, he would settle down presently.

The family took fresh hope from that letter and marked a hypothetical but highly entertaining date on their next year's calendar. "When Martyn came back from Japan," many wonderful things were to happen.

They canvassed the advisability of approaching Mr. Bell with a question as to whether he would allow Dickie to leave at the end of four years. Martyn would almost certainly be home again by the following October, and it might be well, Mr. Lynneker thought, to prepare the way for taking up his offer.

Dickie's own attitude was the one depressing influence.

"You ought to be satisfied now, I should think," Latimer said. "You've made your own terms, apparently, and got everything your own way."

"Oh! yes, if it ever comes off," Dickie said, thoughtfully.

"But Martyn has practically promised," Latimer remonstrated.

"Yes, I know," Dickie returned, "but it's about something a year ahead."

They all attacked him for his insinuation against Martyn's probity, and he did not explain his reasons for doubting his cousin's good faith; but already Dickie had seen evidences of the family spirit in Martyn. Would not any of the Halton or the Culver Lynnekers be willing to promise any concession, if no fulfilment were expected for twelve months? And why had not Martyn boldly faced the argument of Dickie's letter, instead of hinting the probability that they would inevitably come to some form of compromise?

VI

The great events that were to succeed Martyn's homecoming were still a matter of hope and faith at the beginning of October, 1896. Dickie was twenty-one and facing the last of his five years at the City & County, when Mr. Bell offered to raise his salary with a leap to £130 a year and give him the responsible post of head-cashier.

"It's quite an exceptional offer, Lynneker," Mr. Bell explained; "we have never put any man under twenty-six in such a position before; but . . ." he smiled with an

unusual intimacy as he added, "You are quite an exceptional clerk."

"I don't mean to stick to banking, you know, sir," Dickie said.

"It will be a *great* pity, a *great* pity if you do not," Mr. Bell advised him. "I may tell you in the strictest confidence that your advance is practically assured. I can't hope to keep you here, of course,—I have heard, unofficially, that you will be transferred to London, next year—you have splendid chances before you, Lynneker—you are already a marked man in the service . . ." He hesitated, feeling that little more temptation could be needed, before he concluded, "You may well be earning a thousand a year before you are forty."

"But I don't particularly *want* to earn a thousand a year," Dickie explained.

Mr. Bell's smile was more patronising this time.

"Ah! well, you are very young yet, Lynneker," he said. "We'll see what you have to say on that score in twelve months' time; meanwhile, I suppose you're prepared to stay on with us for the last year of your agreement, and to take Bradshaw's place—you had heard he was leaving us?—and," his smile became faintly ironical, "to accept my offer of a considerable rise?"

"Yes, of course, sir," Dickie agreed; "if it is on the clear understanding that I don't pledge myself to stay beyond the five years."

"Certainly, of course," Mr. Bell said. He had no doubt in his own mind that when the time came his protégé would accept the offer that would be made to him.

As he passed to his own seat, Dickie thumped Bradshaw familiarly on the back.

"Secretive bounder," he whispered, "why didn't you tell me you were going?"

Bradshaw glanced nervously at the two juniors. "Will you come and have tea at Hopkinson's?" he asked. He and Dickie shared responsibility, now; and they could never be out together in the middle of the day.

"All serene," Dickie agreed. . . .

Bradshaw reserved his story—an almost tangible air of mystery hung about him as they had tea—until he was safely alone with Dickie in the desecrated cloisters; two of its sides were never used by the ordinary wayfarer whose business led him from the Yard to the Close. And even when he was facing that deserted walk, Bradshaw evidenced a marked reluctance to begin his confidence.

"You see, old man," he said, "I don't suppose you'll hardly credit it, but I'm—I'm hoping to get married," and he looked searchingly and with a sensitive contraction of his little button mouth at Dickie to see if even his quiet acceptance of all peculiarities would carry him over this grotesque announcement.

"Good for you," Dickie said; "but it hardly seems a reason for leaving the Bank. Do I know her?"

Bradshaw drew up his narrow figure with an air of relief, almost of pride.

"You're the only fellow I know, Lynneker," he said, "that I'd really like to call my friend."

"Rot," commented Dickie. "Who's the lady?"

"I *have* mentioned her to you before," Bradshaw said.

"She's been giving me lessons on the pianofort—on the piano, I should say."

"Oh! Miss Young?" put in Dickie.

"Lord! What a memory you've got, old man," Bradshaw remarked admiringly.

"I've heard of her more than once, you know," Dickie explained. "When am I to meet her?"

"As soon as you like," Bradshaw said. "Care to come up there, now? It's only in the Dogsthorpe Road. They've heard a lot about you, I can tell you. I told Ruth," he stammered shyly over the name, "that I should bring you up one afternoon."

"All serene," Dickie returned cheerfully. "But why leave the Bank?" he asked as they turned back towards the Cathedral Yard. "Or have you only been transferred?"

"Well, that wants explaining, too," Bradshaw said.

"You see, Miss Young," he evidently felt safer with that description, "is a year or two older than me and a very great deal cleverer; I've decided, at last, to take up the other line."

"Entertaining?" put in Dickie.

"That sort of thing," Bradshaw acknowledged. "I feel pretty sure it's right, too," he went on. "She understands. She's a lot too good for me, of course, every way . . ."

"And how are you going to begin?"

"We talk of giving a combined concert at the Drill Hall. In fact, we've booked a date for the middle of November, and the bills are being printed. She'll carry the thing through;—she's very wonderful, Lynneker,—and I expect I'll be all right after the first go off. You see, I'm not nervous in the ordinary way, old man,—funny that, isn't it?—I mean that I shan't care a cuss when I'm up on the platform, I know I can make 'em laugh all right. It isn't that. You remember what I've said to you, though, about not caring for the job in one way. Silly, really, I suppose. But there you are. She's agreed with me all along. I've had to persuade her into this business, so there must be something in it. Only, you know, she's a year or two older than me, and we don't want to wait for ever, and I'm not going to marry her on two-fifteen a week—that's about what it works out at. And it's funny, but I know I can make money at the other thing."

"I don't see any earthly reason why you shouldn't go in for entertaining," Dickie said.

"I know you don't," Bradshaw agreed. "That's had a lot of weight with me, too. But it isn't altogether a thing you can argue about. Damn silly of me, that's all. I am rather a damn silly cuss someways. What she can see in me, I don't know."

As they walked up the Dogsthorpe Road,—Miss Young and her mother lived in one of the small houses at the far end,—Dickie was aware of a desire to defend his companion—not against the criticism and laughter of the crowd at the Drill Hall, but against the woman he was

going to marry. Why had she given way and let Bradshaw sacrifice his scruples? In order that she might live in greater ease? Dickie suddenly pictured her with selfish eyes and a sharp chin; a designing creature plotting to escape the limitations of her hard-working gentility. Instinctively, Dickie felt the need to protect Bradshaw from this snare, even as he had sought to release his mother or old Mrs. Barrett from the cramps of the Medborough Loan Company.

And then the contrast between his picture and his first sight of Miss Young was so grotesque that for one moment he could not realise that he was actually shaking hands with the woman he had come to see. When he had recovered from his amazement, he could have shouted with happy laughter.

She was broad and short, almost squat, with wide, earnest grey eyes and brown hair that grew low on her forehead. Certainly she was not beautiful, but the sweet intentness of her generous smile was compensation for any physical short-coming. This was a woman whom every one must trust.

And she manifestly adored Bradshaw even as he adored her. They so admired and respected each other that Bradshaw's long silence respecting their engagement—it transpired presently that they had been engaged for over three years—was suddenly comprehensible. He had not dared to expose so fine a devotion to any chance of possible ridicule. It may have been that his recent shrinking from the advertisement of his own peculiarities had had its origin in this source—he had winced at the thought of displaying Ruth Young's chosen lover as a mere clown. From that to the thought of thankfulness to God for such as He had given, was a short step.

Dickie felt a sense of relief in the companionship of those two lovers. They touched the reality that unconsciously he was always seeking; they gave him an answer to one of his many problems. He could not accuse them of offering palliations to expediency. Either was imper-

turbably ready for any personal sacrifice. He understood that with them he could be utterly frank. He told them of the vision he had had in the Dogsthorpe Road.

Miss Young did not laugh. Her wide eyes became very grave and earnest as she said,

"And you wanted to protect Mark from me?"

Dickie grinned. "I'm always blundering into that sort of mistake," he explained.

"I wish every one blundered like that," Miss Young said, looking at Dickie with immense approval. "I often wanted Mark to tell you about us. He's always talking of you and I've thought that you couldn't be as nice as he said you were or else he would have told you."

"You were quite right, of course," muttered Bradshaw.

"He's a rotter," Dickie said genially.

"He certainly *is*, in this case," Ruth agreed.

Bradshaw blushed at the flattery of attention he was receiving.

"I've told Lynneker about the concert," he said by way of diverting the conversation.

"And you agree that it's the best thing to do, don't you?" put in Ruth eagerly. "Mark is so sensitive about it, and I haven't wanted him to go in for entertaining—we could quite well have got married on a hundred and forty a year and I could have gone on teaching, but he wouldn't. He says he has been silly about that; about what he calls making an exhibition of himself, and that he ought to have begun long ago. But do you think he will really like it when it comes to the point?"

They both looked at Dickie as to an oracle.

"He'll be all right," Dickie returned with conviction; and the Lynneker cliché had a new force; it was no longer the expression of a feeble procrastination, but a ringing prophecy.

Ruth and Bradshaw looked at each other with happy relief. They had so often debated the problem and now it seemed that it was finally solved for them by this one bold announcement.

"Anyway, you've pretty well burnt your boats," Dickie added; "given notice to the Bank, booked the Hall and that sort of thing."

"Yes, I know we had. We thought we must do something desperate to settle it," Ruth said. "But we were still a little uneasy; and, now, you've convinced us."

"Hooray," Dickie said. "We'll all come, of course."

"Do you think the Cathedral people . . . ?" began Ruth.

"Rather," Dickie interrupted her. He felt equal to leading in the Bishop by the nose if necessary. He might not be able to persuade Edward or Latimer—he could hear their excuses—but he would get the others.

"I'll begin with the Dean," he said. "He's been rather decent to me once or twice lately, in the Cathedral Library." He would have gone immediately if they had had the tickets ready for him.

He had lifted the prospects of their concert out of the hesitation that had perceptibly clouded their immediate happiness. He had made their venture appear a splendid enterprise. They talked no more of Bradshaw's scruples, but of his coming fame. They remembered that Corney Grain had stayed the night as an honoured guest in the house of Archdeacon Fortescue the winter before.

"But I'll have to be very careful with my show if the Cathedral people are coming," Bradshaw said. "I'd been thinking rather of the shop-keepers and that lot. I'm not sure, dear, whether I won't rough out another sketch instead of that one I told you about."

The artist in Bradshaw was all alight.

"He's tremendously clever at getting ideas and things, you know," was Ruth's chorus. "He can even make *me* laugh when he wants to."

"Well, of course," agreed Dickie. "It's a gift with him. . . ."

And yet, as he rode home he had one passing moment of doubt as to whether those two fond lovers would not have found greater happiness on £140 a year than they would in a future, however successful, founded on Brad-

shaw's gift for making laughter. It came to him that his friend might lose something in the applause that awaited him.

VII

At the end of October, when the bills and tickets for the Bradshaw Concert were printed and delivered, Dickie undertook his canvass of the Precincts with the same eagerness and determination that he had displayed in his attack upon the Loan Company. On this occasion he was not worried by the ethic of his endeavour, he had not again reverted to his doubt concerning the ultimate betterment of his friend; and would not, in any case, have trusted his own judgment on so obscure a matter. He regarded his advocacy of the Bradshaw cause as the obvious thing for him to do, and he took a great pleasure in doing it.

His success was not due to any special virtue of persistence, but to his lack of self-consciousness and to his convincing manner of advertising Bradshaw's qualifications as a man and an entertainer.

"Certainly, I will take tickets, Lynneker," the Dean said without the least hesitation when he was canvassed in the Cathedral Library one Thursday afternoon.

"But you'll come, too, sir, won't you?" Dickie insisted. "It isn't really the money they want so much as the *éclat*. And I should immensely like you to see him, sir," he concluded.

Before he escaped, the Dean had promised both his personal attendance and his active patronage. He had promised to mention the Concert to his friends.

Dickie had hopes of getting the Bishop.

And after that there was no trouble, even with Edward and Latimer. The Bradshaw venture had been made a Cathedral function, and every one who counted, or wished to count, was anxious to be seen there. The modest proposal of two rows of five shilling seats was soon shown to be absurdly inadequate. Eventually they had seven.

"Oh! don't thank me, thank the Dean—he did it all," expostulated Dickie, embarrassed by the gratitude of his two friends.

"But you did the Dean," Bradshaw said, and Ruth had a long accusation of other work done that Dickie could not defend. After he had made sure of the five-shilling seats, he had whipped up the shopkeepers. . . .

Socially and financially the success of the concert was assured a fortnight before the date of performance; but there was a terrible moment on the night when Bradshaw's success as an artist hung in the balance.

The programme was not a long one. Ruth opened with a piano solo, the middle was filled by a professional soprano known to Ruth, the well-known glee quartette of men's voices led by Mr. Bell, and the pet chorister, Willie Butler, who delighted all Medborough and its neighbourhood, not only by the sweetness of his voice in the Cathedral anthem, but also by his splendid aplomb on the concert platform. He was, indeed, the perfect chorister of romance; he even had curly hair.

And Bradshaw, the fount and origin of the whole affair, wound up the first part by singing to his own accompaniment two unpublished songs of Scott-Gatty's,—by kind permission,—namely, "Who d'you think was there?" and "My dear Aunt Jane." The songs, themselves, were unimpeachable by Cathedral standards, but the performer overdid his facial contortions. It was then that his fate hung in the balance.

The Precincts laughed, but they were just a shade uneasy. The applause they vouchsafed lacked enthusiasm, and the comments that Dickie heard were not of the kind he desired.

"Amusing person . . . certainly funny . . . such an oddity . . ." were phrases conveying a hint of the reservation which was no doubt plainly spoken in the dropped voices that followed the audible comment. Dickie, standing in his capacity of steward against the wall of the side aisle, knew too well that the whispered confidences ex-

pressed in some form or another the criticism that Bradshaw was "slightly vulgar."

If there had been any tendency among those first ranks to leave the Hall at that moment, the affair would have been a failure. Dickie, debating the possibility of preventing a rout by addressing the audience at large, stood rigid, with his eyes fixed on the stooping shoulders of the Dean. While he stood firm, all would be well. And the Dean stood firm; he sat nearly at the end of the third row with a vacant chair on his right hand, and in the middle of the interval he beckoned Dickie over to him.

"I suppose your friend Bradshaw will give us his best at the end of the second part—in this sketch of his, eh?" asked the Dean confidentially.

"Yes, sir, that's his big thing," Dickie said.

"Er—do you know what it's about?" the Dean asked.

"I heard him rehearse it, sir," Dickie said.

"The truth is," went on the Dean, dropping his voice still lower, "that the Bishop said he might come in at the end of the performance—I am keeping this chair for him, and I wanted to be sure—d'you think he'll like it, Lynneker?"

"I'm sure he will, sir," Dickie said without hesitation. "He's got a jolly sense of humour, hasn't he? You can see it in his history."

The Dean smiled gravely. "If you say so . . ." he began and gave his characteristic nod of the head. "Well, well, if you say so, Lynneker. . . ."

"I'm sure it will be all right, sir," Dickie returned as he got up.

After that the situation was saved for the time being. The final result depended upon Bradshaw. Dickie considered the advisability of a visit to the retiring-room and of a hint that the facial contortion business might be overdone. He decided against it on the ground that Bradshaw might be upset and made self-conscious. He had conveyed the impression that he had, after all, been rather

nervous during his first performance; that he had, perhaps, been over anxious to get a laugh.

He made no mistake on his second appearance. His sketch, "No one takes me seriously," contained more than a hint of pathos; and when, at the conclusion, in the last chorus of the song on which he based his sketch, he changed suddenly into the minor and wound up in a whisper to the accompaniment of one desolate chord, the house was obviously moved.

Bradshaw had touched them to response; and the Bishop, who had crept in quietly and sat by the Dean, and who had laughed quite uproariously at the right moments, led the applause with a vigour that alone would have inspired the Precincts to acclaim the lowest of low comedians.

"Capital, capital," approved the Bishop in a comfortably audible voice; and the Dean looked over his shoulder and smiled his approbation to Dickie. . . .

Dickie found Ruth in happy tears when he went to the retiring-room after the last call had been responded to; but Bradshaw's eyes were very bright and there was a new note in his self-depreciation as he came forward and wrung Dickie's hand.

"It's all your doing, old chap," Bradshaw said, excitedly. "I say, the Bishop *was* there; and laughed, too, didn't he? Ruth and I simply owe it all to you. She's naturally a bit overcome for the minute, aren't you, dear? Awful rot, that stuff of mine, of course, but it seemed to go. That touch of pathos at the end?"

"Oh! wasn't he simply splendid?" asked Ruth.

Certainly, there had always been the making of an artist in Bradshaw.

VIII

Martyn got home from Japan just in time for Latimer's wedding in February, and came down to Halton, making an excuse of the occasion in order, as he wrote, to have "a long talk with cousin Dick about his future plans."

The wedding itself was a less ostentatious affair than Edward's and the Lynneker connexion was not well represented. Since the Culver deal had been finally settled, the relations between Latimer and his cousins had been growing steadily more distant. The Canon's eldest son, Richard, had come home for a week from his Birmingham curacy, and although there had been no open quarrel, he had probably influenced his sisters; and, now, that he had the money comfortably in hand, the old Canon himself was regretting the loss of the advowson. He had apologised in a stately way to his son, and after that he became increasingly anxious to forget Latimer's existence. So at the end of November an exchange of curates had been arranged with the Bishop's consent, and Latimer was now to receive his title for priest's orders in the parish of Bessington at the other end of the diocese. Luckily there had been "rather a good house" vacant at Bessington, and Mrs. Blackwell had taken it on a short lease (the Canon could not live for ever) and had advertised the place in the Thrapley Road to let unfurnished. She had finished with Medborough. The Precincts had shown her plainly enough since the engagement that they had only accepted her on sufferance, and were glad to have a valid excuse for dropping her. Even Latimer was still ignorant as to the characters and professions of her father and the late Vincent Blackwell.

But Bessington, and later Culver, would be her own kingdom. She could rule there as she could never have ruled in Medborough. Nevertheless in face of clerical and family disapproval, she was well advised to plan the least ostentatious of weddings.

Martyn was the only guest at Halton. His long visit to Japan had had no perceptible effect upon him. He talked little of his experiences and observations of the country, and the little he said was chiefly in the nature of a footnote to his ordinary conversation. It seemed that his great monograph on the Lynneker family had been hanging fire

and that for the next few months he was going to devote himself to that work.

And the "long talk with cousin Dick" never satisfactorily matured. On the one hand, he frequently implied that the arrangement was taken for granted and that Dickie would come up to him in the following September; on the other, he continually shirked any definition of his attitude towards the frank statement of his cousin's desire to avoid any pledge of adherence to the principles of the conservative party. Martyn's "Quite" left so many questions unanswered in that connexion.

But when the Lynnekers—reduced, now, to such a small family-party—were alone again, the Rector began to manifest his increasing anxiety to see his youngest son established under the ægis of his cousin. Indeed, so sincere was the Rector's desire for the accomplishment of this ambition that he put the greatest restraint on his natural disinclinations and talked politics quite reasonably with Dickie after prayers.

"I feel that it's there the hitch comes, Dick," the old man said on a typical occasion. "I think Martyn is a little afraid of committing himself too definitely unless you are prepared to take up the work of our own party."

"I know," Dickie agreed. "Not that he has ever said it—in so many words."

The Rector hesitated and frowned, bracing himself to a tremendous control of his feelings. "I've never understood just what your difficulty is . . ." he suggested.

"I'm not at all clear myself," Dickie said.

"But in that case," urged his father more hopefully, "wouldn't it be possible for you to—to compromise in some way?"

Dickie tried a side movement. "You are a great admirer of Charles Kingsley, aren't you, pater?" he asked.

"Magnificent fellow," agreed the Rector.

"But, pater, he was a socialist—you remember 'Alton Locke' and 'Yeast'."

"A Christian socialist," the Rector said. "Kingsley was a splendid Christian."

"But can one believe one thing religiously and advocate the exact opposite politically?" asked Dickie.

"I don't think I have ever advocated the opposite of Christianity," his father returned, after taking a fresh grasp of his self-control.

"I don't want to make this a personal question," Dickie pleaded. "But on general lines—well, Kingsley certainly carried his religious convictions into some kind of action—the Working Men's Club in London and that sort of thing—and conservatism, as far as I can understand it, is chiefly concerned to keep property in the hands of the rich."

The Rector found an escape for his impatience in a short summary of what he considered to be the aims of the Conservative party. He touched lightly on education—he had worked very hard, and so far successfully, to keep the hated "Board School" with its infamous neglect of religious teaching, out of Halton—but he warmed to the construction of a prettily coloured picture of the generous over-lordship theory; of the paternal treatment of the poor; incidentally of the poor's Christian duty of thankfulness; and of the necessity to have the government of the country administered by those superior minds—the present Premier, for example—who could regard the broad problems of legislation with informed and unprejudiced opinions.

"Socialism would put government in the hands of the rabble, my dear boy," he concluded. "We should have another 'Reign of Terror.' Surely you must see that?"

"But don't you think there ought to be equality of opportunity?" persisted Dickie. "There have been some splendid men who have come up from the people."

"The good men always come up as it is," the Rector said, "refined by the struggle."

He was, on the whole, well satisfied with his own argu-

ment, and wanted, now, to end on the excellent note he had just sounded.

"Well, well, dear boy," he said, getting to his feet. "Think it over and we'll have another chat to-morrow night."

Dickie, thinking it over in his attic, was quite prepared to admit that there was much to be said in favour of his father's views; but he could not reconcile them with any theory of Christianity; and, while he, himself, was inclined to deny the historical validity of the New Testament, he had lost none of his admiration for the spirit of the Christian ethic.

Dickie had been endowed with the wonderful gift of sympathy; and the gift gave him a breadth of outlook that was noticeably precocious in a young man of twenty-two. Also, his reading and thinking during the past five years had been unusually catholic and thorough.

IX

His affairs seemed to be hurrying towards a crisis that summer, and he was aware of a steady desire to postpone decision. He wanted time, and confused himself by an attempt to cram years of work into a few weeks. During April and May he read feverishly; history, sociology, economics, anything that might enlighten his immediate search, and only found himself wading ever deeper into perplexity. He saw no clear issue, and his genuine anxiety to please his father and mother was pushing him towards a decision that he instinctively dreaded.

For himself he had no fear. He had perfect confidence in his own ability to succeed, a confidence that none of his family was able to understand. They all dwelt so persistently on the fact that Martyn's offer was a great "chance" for him; and their tone implied that the refusal of a "chance" was certainly a rash, if it were not an ungodly act. And Dickie, who felt capable of finding his own

chances when the need arose, failed completely to make any of his relations understand that time, and not opportunity, was what he chiefly sought. When he pleaded his youth and ignorance, they turned the plea against him as an argument for trusting their superior knowledge and experience; and while he acknowledged the force of their reasoning, he was conscious, without the least conceit, that they knew nothing of the problem that intrigued him, and, with even greater force, that they could never know. They were all different from him, he thought, but he considered that difference without reference to any abstract conception of superiority. He was, indeed, beginning to regard himself as a person of eccentric and possibly reprehensible opinions.

Two experiences finally helped him towards a more definite judgment of himself and the choice of a career.

The first was Martyn's invitation to stay with him for five days in Mayfair and see the Diamond Jubilee 'procession. And so little did his father and mother and sister understand Dickie, that when he read Martyn's invitation aloud to them at breakfast, they were instantly prepared to make a united effort to force him into acceptance. They glanced at one another as if mutely electing a spokesman, and then Eleanor said, "Well, really, Dick, I think you'll be very foolish if you don't go." She spoke in the tone of one who delivered judgment on a past event.

"I'd like to go," Dickie said, cheerfully, and rather embarrassed them all by thus anticipating all the fervent reasons with which they were, at last almost triumphantly, prepared.

"Come, come, that's settled, then," Mr. Lynneker said, and only Eleanor was left to attempt a kind of posthumous chiding for something that had never existed.

The Rector offered to advance some of the expenses of this grand visit—an outfit would be needed—but Dickie preferred to draw upon his own reserves of capital. During his four and three quarter years at the Bank he had saved nearly £150.

"I want a lot of new clothes, anyhow," he explained.

But despite the pressure put upon him by Edward, Dickie definitely refused to buy a tail-coat and a top-hat.

"Too much expense just for one visit," was his first defence, and when that was broken by the assumption that he would certainly, now, be going up to town "for good" in the autumn, he fell back on the surer ground that the formality of a top-hat was not his "style." Nothing could move him from that. He merely grinned in his obstinate, annoying way when Edward laid down the law concerning London fashions.

"I've had to get a new dress-suit, you see," was his last and most irritating prevarication. "My old one has split across the shoulders."

X

The procession dazed him at the moment, and left him critical when he had time to reconsider his impressions.

After those long hours of waiting, interrupted rather than enlivened by the distracted conversations peculiar to such an occasion, the atmosphere of expectancy so wrapped him about that he rose automatically to the climax and cheered with the swaying emotion of the crowd. This was his first experience of a great infectious excitement, and it seemed to him as he sat perched on the staging that his culminating sight of the stout little woman in black was an immense and glorious satisfaction. The overwhelming dignities of idea and phrase exalted her beyond conception; the idea of controlling kingship, of a great nation typified in this one exhibited figure; and in that supremely moving moment when colour and music had exalted and concentrated the thought of the multitude, such a phrase as "Empress of India" rang through his mind with the visualised glory of a transcending epic. For an instant national sentiment and emotion had found a focus.

Afterwards he was a little ashamed. It seemed to him

that in some unanalysable way he had been false to his own opinions.

But the great fact of the Procession was less lasting as an influence than his various meetings and attempted rapprochements with Martyn's friends and with Martyn himself.

Dickie could find but one answer that satisfied the equation of his general inferences. All these people—in the five days he had met one Government Whip, a Conservative peer, and several less prominent members of the Lower House—were tinged with the Lynneker tradition. There were so many formulæ that they accepted without question. The Whip had been embarrassed and uneasy when Dickie had asked him why the obvious paradoxes of the suffrage could not be done away with.

"You see, I've lived all my life in a country parish," Dickie had explained; "and down there it's quite obvious that the country labourer has no definite ideas as to the uses of his vote."

"We are educating him," the Whip said, evasively.

"Yes, but so is the other party," argued Dickie, "and each of you is trying to teach him a system of rigid ideas, and the two systems contradict each other."

The Whip looked across the table for help and found that he was being momentarily neglected. "Your labourer is left with the power of choice," he said.

"I know," Dickie returned, "he's left to decide which of you has been lying. It doesn't seem to me an intelligent method of education. . . ."

"You've won the reputation of an ardent radical, Dick," Martyn said to him at breakfast on the last morning of his stay in town.

"And I'm not a bit of a radical," Dickie replied. "How is it, Martyn?"

"Your devotion to radices, I suppose," Martyn said. His smile had the tolerant admiration of a musician approving a brilliant performance on the banjo.

"I shouldn't object to taking the premisses for granted

if there were only one set," objected Dickie. "But as there are at least two, I must justify my choice of one set to the exclusion of the others."

"Are they mutually exclusive, Dick?" asked Martyn, and his tone and manner implied that he posed some ultimate question the answer to which had been esoterically revealed to himself and the favoured few, and might be discovered by the eye of genius.

"Absolutely," Dickie said.

Martyn sighed, but still smiled as if it must be admitted that this banjo-player was after all, really, quite clever.

Unfortunately Dickie was not impressed by that hint of some inspired knowledge. He had fully recognised by this time that the brilliant Martyn was a true Lynneker.

XI

The second experience was of another kind.

Brian Lessing, the most influential director of the City & County, came to Medborough in August; principally, Mr. Bell said, in order to interview Dickie.

Lessing was only incidentally one of the Bank's directors; although that office was, perhaps, the most important of the three or four held by him. He was one of the unobtrusive powers of English finance. The public hardly knew his name, but it was eagerly sought for the more substantial City flotations, and very rarely granted.

He was a big, flat-chested man, with thick, short hair and a closely cropped moustache. He was dressed in hairy, strong-smelling tweeds when he came to Medborough and he lounged in Mr. Bell's desk chair with one leg lifted, most uncomfortably, over the wooden arm.

"Well, Lynneker, you're Bell's prize clerk, I hear," was his opening when Dickie was brought in to him by the obviously nervous Mr. Bell. "Your father's a parson, he tells me."

Dickie's "Yes, sir," might have been taken to confirm

either or both statements. He and Lessing stared at each other without any sense of confusion. They took stock of one another without any conflict of wills, and with no more self-consciousness than a butcher might feel in appraising the flesh of a bullock.

"What made you go in for banking?" asked Lessing, still watching Dickie's face.

"Force of circumstances," Dickie said. He unconsciously dropped the formal "sir" in speaking to Lessing; he met him intuitively as an equal.

"Mathematical genius?" enquired Lessing.

"No, not genius," Dickie returned. "I'm pretty good up to a certain point, that's all."

Mr. Bell, hovering nervously in the background, cleared his throat, but Lessing waved him back with a curt gesture of his broad hand.

"Want to make money?" he asked, continuing his cross-examination.

"It isn't a passion with me," Dickie said.

"Don't want to stop in Medborough and count other people's, in any case?"

"No."

"What is a passion with you? Have you got one?"

"Yes, I want to understand . . ." Dickie paused and grinned at his examiner. "What it's all about, you know," he concluded.

Lessing released his leg from the arm of the chair and put his hands on Mr. Bell's table.

"Got the reforming spirit?" he asked, still in the same dry, almost rude, tone.

Dickie shook his head.

"Don't want to do any Good in the world?" Lessing suggested.

"What sort of good?" Dickie asked.

Lessing did not answer that. "Would you be willing to stay on here for another five years," he said, "if I gave you my word that you'd get a first-class job at the end of that time,—thousand a year job, you know?"

Dickie took a moment to consider that before he shook his head again.

"Well, what *do* you want?" Lessing asked sharply.

"To gratify my passion," Dickie said. "I should have thought you could have inferred that."

"To know what life means?"

"You can put it that way."

"And when you've found a solution that satisfies you?"

"I can't see as far as that," Dickie said.

"Interested in politics?" the examination continued.

"From one point of view. The present system, so far as I can understand it, which isn't far certainly, seems to me so infernally unintelligent."

"Oh! does it?" remarked Lessing in another tone, as though he had at last found what he had been seeking. "That's where your lack of experience shows. As a system, it's most infernally intelligent, so intelligent that we gamble on it without being able to understand it. But I'll talk to you about politics another day. Will you take my word for it that you're wrong there?"

Dickie looked thoughtful. "All right," he said; "but just tell me this: is the system founded on the personal interests of the various classes? One lot trying to keep what they've got, and the other lot wanting to get a bit of it away; and the whole business carried on publicly under the pretence that it's something quite different?"

"There's that in it," Lessing agreed; "that's the more obvious side. But there's real government, you know,—public safety, facilities for trade enterprise, national welfare, all that kind of thing. It's a thundering big job to carry on, and it is carried on. And it works. It gives you and me and Bell, here, a chance to do things."

"Government by expediency . . ." murmured Dickie.

"Why, of course, my dear chap," returned Lessing, vigorously. "There's no other way for government. Our government has to serve the needs and protect the rights of forty million people and that means that it's a mighty big machine. There are plenty of injustices, no doubt, and

the balance of benefit goes to the people who've got position and money, because they've got the balance of intelligence and they made the law."

"So you have to lie to the comparatively unintelligent voter?" Dickie put in.

"That's nothing to do with government," Lessing said. "That's party politics, the superficial tinkering with the machine. It serves its purpose incidentally; adds new improvements and that sort of thing, you know. And that's the way to . . . to steady progress. The motto of government is '*festina lente*.' Has to be. Idealism and revolution break up the machine and leave nothing in its place. You can't construct a brand new machine in a year or in ten years. No man, no group of men, have got the foresight for a thing like that. It's too big."

"Yes, I see the point," Dickie said. "But I should like to have a long talk with you about it."

"Right you are, my boy," Lessing said. "Come and have lunch with me at the Great Northern. I've got to catch the two o'clock to Edinburgh. There are one or two things I want to say to Bell, first. I'll pick you up as I come through. . . ."

Dickie learnt many things in the course of that lunch at the Great Northern Hotel, but the lesson he principally pondered later was that of his own ignorance. He was provincial and he was superficial, he decided. He had failed to comprehend the intricacies of these problems of government, of economics and sociology, as he had failed to comprehend the subtler theorems of the calculus, or the ethics of his attack upon George Smith. He had been too ready to come to a conclusion. Even the word "expedience" had taken a new colour when it had been elaborated by Brian Lessing. The Lynnekers saw expedience as a goal, and so Dickie had come to hate it. Lessing saw it as a means, as a useful, necessary tool that might be discarded on occasion. Dickie had a vision of him as a free man outside the net, using it for his own purposes.

And Lessing and himself were of the same fibre. They

had both realised that. But Dickie alone had perceived that behind their likeness was a fundamental difference. Lessing wanted knowledge for his own purposes; Dickie wanted it without ulterior object.

XII

At the end of the lunch Lessing had made a proposition. It seemed that while he had been talking fluently and convincingly of the business of right government, some part of his mind had been engaged with other things.

He had stopped abruptly in his exposition and looked at his watch.

"Well, Lynneker," he had said. "That will have to do for now. You can work for yourself on what I've told you."

And then he had made his proposition, cut and dried, with no question of alternatives or contingencies.

"I want you to stay on with Bell for another year," he had said; "and then I'll take you into my office. You're too good for any Bank—too much routine, not enough scope. We needn't bother about salary, you can have what you want. . . . I shall take you into my own room—no mechanical work, you understand. I want you for the big things. . . . I shall be sending you to America and Berlin, and Europe, generally. You'll be qualified to represent me in five years' time. . . . By the way, do you read French and German? Good! Keep that up. You'll get practice in conversation later. And train yourself to think in foreign moneys."

Throughout he had taken Dickie's acquiescence for granted.

XIII

Nor was there any serious doubt in Dickie's mind as to his acceptance of the offer. It meant so many things;

intimacy with the strong, clear mind of Brian Lessing, for example; but above all—education. Dickie had a clear picture of himself as absurdly provincial. He had been narrow; he had been biassed by the limitations of his circumstances. America, Berlin, Europe generally, would give him wider views.

And that other offer, the tentative, hesitating, contingent offer of Martyn's, slid suddenly into contempt. It had the quality of a dream, of a weakly coloured romance. Perhaps it had never had real substance, but had arisen from the imaginings of Martyn's mind. And at the best it had proposed a dalliance with the essential things of life:—a moving on the surface; a regard for dress as a means to social advancement; a respect for social conventions, for the "right" people, for manners and decency; these were the idols of Martyn's world. At the end, perhaps, an ornamental seat in the Cabinet, as a respected minister; too wise to interfere with the capable administration of the permanent secretaries. . . .

Lessing was strong enough to despise the lesser rules of expediency. (His tweeds had had an air of being used to him; and Dickie thought it probable that he wore them in town as well as in the country.) He would supple his back to nobody. He was almost a free man.

By contrast Martyn appeared as little better than a fortunate marionette. . . .

Mr. Bell had a half-expectant, half-anxious air when Dickie returned to the Bank after lunch, but business was unusually brisk that afternoon, and the manager and his cashier found no opportunity for private conversation until after four o'clock.

And then Mr. Bell's hitherto suppressed impatience was manifested by an instant departure to his private parlour. Dickie followed with reluctance. He had more than an hour's solid work before him.

"Well, Lynneker, what do you think of Mr. Lessing?" Mr. Bell asked eagerly. "A remarkable personality, eh?

I suppose he gave you no hint as to his future intentions with regard to yourself?"

"He wants me to stay on here for another year," Dickie said, "and then he is going to take me into his own office."

Mr. Bell's face expressed perplexity. "His own office?" he repeated vaguely.

"He said he could find a better use for me than the mechanical work of banking," Dickie explained without a thought for the brutality of his implication.

"Ah! yes, I see," Mr. Bell said. His expression of boyish expectancy had vanished; he looked down at his desk and began to smooth out a perfectly flat sheet of blotting paper.

"You will accept that, of course?" he said, without looking up.

"I think so, sir," Dickie said.

The manager nodded absently. "Oh, well," he said. "Perhaps I ought to have guessed." He paused and took up a bunch of forms. "I expect you have a lot of entries to make," he added.

Dickie accepted his dismissal without comment.

He understood his manager's pique, and reflected on it while he rapidly and neatly (he was always a good workman) made up his books. He understood that he had been especially marked out and trained for the Bank's service; that he had, perhaps, been the particular "find" of Mr. Bell's life. And his disappointment was certainly excusable, if a little selfish. The manager of the Medborough branch of the City & County had not been eager in the first place for his clerk's success; he had wanted the prestige of making the discovery, of demonstrating still further how well he served his employers. Dickie was sorry to have caused that disappointment, but a little resentful, nevertheless. Had he not always made it quite clear that he had no intention of remaining in the Bank's employ?

Dickie could not know that his manager still sat in his private room, idly playing with the bunch of forms and

thinking of himself, for the first time, as a failure. His success had seemed so much to him who had once been a chorister. The adequate house in the Upminster Road, his wife and his two little daughters were the vouchers for his achievement. And he had a position in the town; he was respected for his professional capacities; admired for his musical gifts. He had won all that by his own effort. He knew that he was a figure in Medborough, something more dignified than your average bank-manager.

And, now, in one careless sentence, this boy of his finding had poured contempt on all that achievement. At twenty-two he had been found too good for employment in this service which had always seemed so fine to his chief. His work had been stigmatised as mechanical, and for one long half-hour, Arthur Bell drooped before the presentation of his own limitations; before the thought that he had pitched his ambition too low; that, perhaps, he also might have aspired to be "too good" for mere banking. Beyond that humble employment, immense vistas of fame and power stretched, as it seemed, almost illimitably. . . .

Nor could Dickie instantly appreciate his own family's attitude when he gave them an account of his offer from Brian Lessing.

The Rector smiled his general satisfaction at the compliment paid to his boy's ability, and then said, "But, of course, you wouldn't give Martyn the go-by for that,"—an opinion that was instantly endorsed by sounds of feminine approval.

"I'd sooner go to Mr. Lessing," Dickie said.

His father, mother and sister expressed shocked surprise.

"But why?" they asked and gave the reasons for their own choice.

"Was Mr. Lessing a gentleman? Could he introduce Dickie to people with influence? What would come of it? And then: Martyn was such a Capital Person; he had such perfect manners, was so much at home in Any society. . . ."

They discussed the whole magnificent, beneficent aspect of Martyn's proposal among the three of them, while Dickie waited patiently until they should return to their direct enquiry as to the reason for his own prejudice.

And as he listened, the Lynneker attitude, the English attitude, towards this one question, came out before him in one concise, vivid picture.

They accepted and glorified the past. They referred to it as to an ideal that might and should be reconstructed. The old had been tried and was approved; the new was suspect, and better avoided. His father's test began: "In my day . . ." that comfortable day in which, it seemed now, was never anything new and disturbing; although the Rector's father had used the same phrase and had abhorred the propaganda of the Utopists, and the Reform Bill, and the coming of steam traction. And so, no doubt, had generation after generation of Lynnekers found some imagined ideal in the past. Before this, that and the other,—the French Revolution, the Hanoverian Succession, the Civil War,—everything had been, somehow, more glorious, finer, more desirable. Step by step they might be followed back to some primitive ancestor who had preferred flint to the new-fangled bronze weapon that had driven his tribe westward. But always they had been driven forward. Some power, invisible and indefinable, had always overcome their inertia, tumbled them one step onward, and left them to deplore the wonderful past out of which they had been mercilessly thrust,—and to congratulate themselves on the fact that in spite of almost insuperable difficulties they had risen to the occasion.

They sought no explanation of life; the explanation had always been given by a preceding generation. . . .

And Martyn's name figured in the *Morning Post* among the guests at great houses; and Brian Lessing was only "something in the City," as Mrs. Lynneker smilingly put it.

They so brilliantly convinced themselves of the truth of their objections to the new scheme, that at last they turned

to Dickie with the happy certainty that they had not left him a leg to stand on.

"I really do not think, my boy, that you can afford to give Martyn the go-by now," the Rector said.

"He doesn't want me," Dickie said, and after that statement had been denied and disproved at length, he continued: "He never meant it quite seriously. He dreams about it, and he may go on dreaming about it for years, but he'll never *do* anything."

And so, pushing past a weakening barrier of denials, he came to a statement of his own position.

"And even if Martyn's offer came to anything," he said, "I should be dependent on him for some years, and I don't want to be dependent on anybody. But that hardly counts. The point is that I shan't learn anything if I get called to the Bar and go into society and all that. It's only the same old stuff over again. I saw the sort of thing I should be expected to do and say, when I was up there for the Jubilee. If I go to Lessing's I shall go abroad to America and Europe, and meet people who have different points of view. And I like Mr. Lessing himself. He doesn't take everything for granted. He has thought things out for himself. . . ."

He could not reach the end of his explanation. His father's rising irritability broke into petulance. Deep down in the Rector's consciousness was an inherited memory of old injuries, and instinctively he fought against the reincarnation of the detested power that had once driven him westward with a bronze spear.

"Of course, if you know better than your father and mother," he began, getting to his feet, and then, choked by the very righteousness of his own evidently just cause, he left the room with more anger than dignity.

Out of her distress Mrs. Lynneker evoked one last desperate poser.

"But what would you *be* if you went into Mr. Lessing's office?" she asked.

"Nothing particular," Dickie said. "I don't know that I want to *be* anything particular; I want to learn."

They could not understand him. They were afraid of him. He was bronze to their flint, and they clung with desperation to their familiar, comprehensible home.

BOOK TWO

XIII

JULY, 1903

I

DURING his five years' probation in Brian Lessing's office in Austin Friars, Dickie found a new valuation of Halton and Medborough. All that placid country and its associations settled into a steady, unchanging background, against which each new impression glared briefly in bright relief. The recent orderliness of Berlin, the flamboyance of Paris, the naked boast of New York appeared to him now and again as the perspective of splendid gardens, raised against a setting of long, grey hills. But certain quarters of Paris and much of heterogeneous, untidy London would suddenly revive in him the deep impressions of the background. It was as if in the midst of cultivated and exotic flowers, he came unexpectedly upon some primitive fallow or deep, waste wood, upon the simple enduring growths from which every bloom in those gay parterres had wonderfully sprung. On the Isle of Notre Dame, in the cloisters of Westminster or facing the sturdy masses of the Tower, he found another aspect of Halton and Medborough that confronted and perplexed him.

For if he had come during those six years in the London & County Bank to deny the value of all that he had symbolised by the word "expediency," so now he felt an increasing urgency to free himself from the ruthless fighting of the money market. He had escaped from his net, and taken the thing in his hands to discover that the only use for it was to snare his fellow-men.

And he was aware that whereas during his imprisonment, the desire to free himself had steadily grown, now that he had won to a measure of control over others, he was hardening, crystallising. Already he had lost something of the virtue of sympathy, and used his power to read men's minds rather than to understand their spirit. His longing for new knowledge was giving place to pride in the use of that he had already gained; and the new knowledge he still sought was desired as a means to greater power. The magic of a game that "worked" had nearly enchanted him. . . .

He had come to a knowledge of his ability within twelve months of his establishment in the Austin Friars office. Brian Lessing had put a case to him one morning at the beginning of September, 1899; and after a brief consideration of the known side of the problem, Dickie had given it as his opinion that a war between England and the Boer Republics was an improbable eventuality. He had given his reasons with conviction, and Lessing had listened quietly and nodded approval.

"Very good, Lynneker," he had said when the case had been argued. "I wanted an opinion that would be representative of the shrewder business man, and yours fits well enough. Now, let us take a fresh set of suppositions."

And then he had stated new premisses that were dependent upon subtle inferences, the bases of which were unknown to the public his protégé had represented, and Dickie had had a sight of the fine intricacies and delicate finesse of the game he was being taught to play. He had argued with and cross-examined his teacher at great length that morning before admitting that they were justified in selling to the buyers who believed in the integrity of purpose of the British Government.

Those revelations of Lessing's which had been apparently so well justified by the event, influenced Dickie to a strong sympathy with the Boer Republics during the critical year of war. Under advice from his principal, he made at home no profession of what in that emotional, hysterical period would have been regarded as his traitorous opinions, but in

America and on the Continent he talked freely to many men of position and learnt to criticise England from the outside. He had gained immensely in knowledge and in power before the Peace of Vereeniging, and had lost something he could not clearly indicate. The certain gain had seemed for a time to outweigh the uncertain loss.

And it was not until July, 1903, when his five years' probation was nearly over and Lessing had made him an offer amounting to a junior partnership, that Dickie paused to consider his balance before committing himself to a decision.

"I must have time to think this out," he said more in his old manner, when the offer was made.

Lessing had looked at him keenly. "You can have three months," he returned. "I shall be going to America in September."

"It must be three months' independence then," Dickie stipulated. "I can't see the fence from here."

"Where shall you go?" Lessing asked.

Dickie gave a day's thought to that before he decided to go home to Halton. He had seen little of his own people in the past five years. He had had no fixed holidays, and had taken a few days here and there when he had been abroad, in preference to a regulation month devoted to a prescribed idling. Also, he had dreaded the subject of the war during those short week-ends he had occasionally spent at the Rectory.

A casual sight of the Tower of London had finally clinched his decision. For one moment he had seen again an aspect of Halton in that stolid monument, and had suffered a pang of home-sickness. He had seen the calm, wide-browed church on the hill and it had spoken to him of something he had lost,—of some permanent spirit that had found expression in Gothic architecture, and was now seeking another likeness in the fierce evolution of the new century.

Dickie had known then that he was in danger of crystallising before his growth was complete.

At twenty-eight he decided to throw all his experience into a mental flux, and make a new, unprejudiced choice.

When he communicated his decision to Lessing, his chief frowned impatiently.

"You'll be a damned fool if you chuck this, Dick," he said, and after a pause he added, "There's nothing any better."

"I haven't said I should chuck it," Dickie returned.

"Every business, every road to power, goes by our route," Lessing went on. "You have to choose whether you'll be slave or master, that's all. And you haven't the makings of a slave, my son."

II

In the train going home from Kings Cross, Dickie reflected on that saying and dismissed it as an insufficient and faulty generalisation. He was travelling first-class from force of habit and he sat opposite the new Bishop of Medborough,—Dr. Stewart Browne had received his preferment and gone to London some ten months before.

Dr. Olivier, his successor, was of a different type, more aristocratic and less scholarly. His ritualistic tendencies were regarded with a slight suspicion by the older Cathedral clergy, but he had the full support of the new Dean—the only person of importance in this connexion. The late Dean, who would have brooked no interference with his authority over the Cathedral services, had been promoted to the Bishopric of Worcester eighteen months before London fell vacant, and those who understood the policy that influenced the choice of those high appointments, had guessed that the way was being prepared for Olivier. Indeed, some of the prophets went further and predicted that their new bishop was destined for York, if not for Canterbury. Medborough was an acknowledged stepping stone to the highest ecclesiastical offices.

Dr. Olivier regarded his sole fellow passenger with an

enquiring interest during the first half of the journey from Kings Cross to Medborough. He had come from a West-end living, and rather flattered himself on his ability to "place" strangers. Dickie, at the age of twenty-eight, proved uncommonly difficult to place. His tweed suit and the soft hat that he wore well at the back of his head, his big, powerful frame and the strong movements of his capable hands, all seemed to indicate the athlete. On this evidence he might have been judged to be, perhaps, one of those brilliant amateurs who devote the whole summer to first-class cricket—a young man of independent means whose ambition was satisfied by the certainty of a place in the Test Matches between England and Australia.

The Bishop, leaning back in his corner and taking quiet observations from behind the cover of his *Church Times*, hesitated over the theory of the independent amateur and rejected it on physiognomical grounds. Dickie's face was not the face of a man who lived for games; and that steady, incisive stare of his had a quality that Olivier remembered in one or two successful business men among his late congregation. And then those two contradictory inferences were both qualified by a notable air of boyishness, even of innocence. This was a man, Olivier thought, who might suddenly ask some absurdly ingenuous question.

The Bishop recrossed his gaiters and laid the *Church Times* on his apron. Dickie had not attempted to read since he entered the compartment. For a moment the two men looked thoughtfully at each other, and then the Bishop smiled graciously and said:

"I have been taking the liberty of speculating as to your profession. I must admit to a quite impertinent curiosity in my fellow-men."

"You are Dr. Olivier, aren't you?" returned Dickie, bluntly.

"Your deduction was not a difficult one," the Bishop said, "if you happen to take an interest in the affairs of the church."

"My father is one of your clergy," explained Dickie. "My name is Lynneker."

"Ah! the Rector of Halton," Olivier exclaimed, paused as if he would make some comment and went on: "And then there are two of your brothers surely in my diocese, at Thrapley and Culver. Are you the only one of the family out of orders?"

"I was in the City & County Bank of Medborough for six years," Dickie said, "and since then I've been five years with Brian Lessing,—you may have heard of him, a financier in the grand style, you know,—now I'm going home for three months to decide what I'm going to do."

"Finance does not interest you?" Olivier enquired.

"It does, immensely; but I can't see my future in it."

"You want to make money more quickly; or is it fame, perhaps?"

"That isn't the point at all," Dickie said. "I want to be sure about certain things. Look here, sir. Lessing said a day or two ago that one must be either a master or a slave. Now that seems to me a faulty classification, don't you think so?"

"Too categorical, perhaps," Olivier hazarded safely, with a doubt as to whether he would be understood. That brief account of his travelling-companion's business career held little suggestion of any acquaintance with philosophy.

"Precisely," Dickie agreed with approval. "I am getting sick of these water-tight compartments—they don't work."

"Mankind is certainly not to be classified under arbitrary headings," admitted the Bishop, and reflected that this original young man had little in common with his two elder brothers. He found that his companion was regarding him with steady enquiry.

"You can't believe that, you know," Dickie remarked.

Olivier smiled gravely. "I don't see why not," he said, his thoughts still busy with the classification of Brian Lessing.

"It's the essential of your whole dogma," Dick returned. "Good men and sinners, sheep and goats, heaven and hell.

All hard and fast categories. The English church doesn't admit the fine shades that get their chance in Purgatory."

But the Bishop was on his own ground there. "In effect it does," he said and proceeded to give his authorities for the doctrine of the "Saving Grace."

Dickie listened attentively. "That is all splendid common sense," he said, when the argument had been rounded up, "but how do you reconcile it with your subscription to the Athanasian Creed and the thirty-nine articles?"

Olivier's smile became slightly whimsical and he leaned forward and touched Dickie's knee. "I don't try very hard," he said, "but you must not give me away at Halton. Your father might be a little shocked if he knew that I had discarded the idea of Eternal Punishment. But to be quite honest with you, that idea nearly kept me out of the church."

Dickie grinned his appreciation of the confidence. "Doesn't that make it a little difficult for you—episcopally?" he asked.

"Only with a few of the older clergy," Olivier said, and went on to expound the need, as he saw it, for vitalising the church. It seemed that he was of the new school and sought a greater rapprochement between science and theology.

"You're horribly handicapped by the necessity for expediency, aren't you?" was Dickie's comment when the other had finished.

"In a sense, yes," Olivier admitted. "But I don't believe in iconoclasm. The people understand the old symbols, and one is better advised to use them, than to attempt the invention of an entirely new set. That is what evolution means to me, a gradual change and development."

"Oh, yes, I'm coming to think you're right," Dickie agreed. "I gave up the chance of a political career six years ago, because I refused to admit any virtue in the doctrine of expediency. I'm not sure now that I might not have done something by using the old material in my own way."

The grind of the brakes warned them that they were

very near Medborough, and the Bishop stood up and took down his top-hat from the rack.

"I wish you would come and see me," he said, as the train ran into the station. "You have interested me greatly. Did you say you would be at Halton for some months?"

"Three months, probably," Dickie said.

The Bishop held out his hand. "Well, will you come and lunch with me one day? I'll write to you," he said. "I'm not quite sure of my appointments at the moment. And, let me see, I don't know your Christian name. . . ."

On the platform, respectfully awaiting recognition, stood two porters and Eleanor.

"Dick! Did the Bishop invite you to lunch?" Eleanor asked after the briefest of greetings.

"Did you know him before?" was her next question, and then, "Why were you travelling 'first'?"

Dickie realised then that even so long a period as five years was not necessarily a period of growth, and that he had much to explain to them all at the Rectory about himself. He had had so little time during those short week-end visits of his.

III

Eleanor had driven in with Archer, the Rectory factotum, in the Stanhope. Archer and the cob were new to Dickie, but he had always known the Stanhope. The Rector had had it built for him in Medborough the year after he was married, and although the dark green cloth of the upholstery was disgracefully shabby, the body was still reliable and it had had new wheels fitted only ten years before. Dickie drove, and Archer occupied the reversible back seat, set to face away from the horse. None of that family had ever seen that seat arranged to face forward in the proper Stanhope fashion, the Rector had always maintained that it threw the balance too far back.

Eleanor gave her brother no confidences during the four-

mile drive. At the outset she had indicated Archer as a check to intimate conversation. He was not a Halton man, but he had married a girl from the village and inferentially was not to be trusted with any Lynneker news, particularly of the kind that had not already been communicated to her brother by letter.

Their conversation chiefly concerned the eminently safe topic of Dr. Olivier. Dickie was reserved in his account of the subject discussed in the train,—he knew that Eleanor clung hopefully to the theory of Eternal Punishment and found much consolation in the belief that those people who persistently annoyed her would undoubtedly envy her through eternity,—but he asked many questions about the Bishop's popularity in his diocese.

"He is popular," Eleanor decided with her habitual frown. She seemed never to give an opinion now without hinting some important qualification that could not be disclosed. "And so is Lady Constance," she added. Olivier had married the daughter of a peer.

"But . . ." prompted Dickie.

Eleanor glanced at Archer's unconcerned back and shook her head warningly. "Every one appears to like him," she said in a carrying voice; and Dickie inferred that Dr. Olivier's views with regard to the "saving grace" were not unknown at Halton.

"Seems a good sort," he remarked. "No side about him."

"What an odd thing to say of a Bishop," Eleanor commented.

At thirty-five she had solved her own personal problem. While her father lived, she admitted a necessary diversion; she must do for him all that her mother had failed to do. When he died she would mourn for him, count his death as the great tragedy of her life, and devote herself with an undisturbed singleness of purpose to what she believed to be the service of God. Already the villagers feared her as they had never feared the Rector, although he, too, had been liable to prejudice, in his judgments on their moral short-comings. And the curate whose services had become

essential as Mr. Lynneker grew older, breathed a clerical anathema when he saw Eleanor coming up the brick path to his cottage door. The poor man had enough worries with three children between the ages of ten and fifteen and an income of £140 a year—counting his wife's little patrimony—to provide for everything. Miss Lynneker appeared to think he was wasting his time because he devoted the best part of his morning to the education of his two boys; but he was determined that she should not compel him to send Ernest to the National School, and Frank, who was too old for that, must be prepared for some vocation. Mr. Watson hoped that his Rector's influence might get Frank into the City & County Bank when he was seventeen. He was a willing boy but rather stupid at figures. Eleanor's theory of serving God gave her little opportunity for winning the love of her fellows. She sought Divine, not human approval. The criticisms and reactions of three brothers and a sister had distracted her until she was thirty. After that she had seen her way clearly.

"Even bishops were once naughty little boys at school," remarked Dickie cheerfully, and disregarded his sister's frown of displeasure. She had always frowned on him since that avowal of agnosticism in the Rectory drawing-room, but he never deliberately annoyed her. He was sorry for "poor old Eleanor, she had never had a chance"; but since he had been so long away, he was a little apt to forget how immeasurably her outlook differed from his own.

And just now he was looking out with a fresh eagerness for his first sight of Halton spire. They were nearly at the crest of the road across the common, and he wanted to get a new impression that might blend with his sight of Notre Dame and Westminster and the Tower, and give him a key to the meaning of Halton in the scheme of life. But when, at last, he saw the point of the spire pricking up behind the elms, it made him think of the days when he rode home along that road from the City & County. He remembered his hot desire for knowledge and wondered

if he had not sought the wrong kind. If he had had a different education, he might have gone in for scientific research. That would have given him an unending path along which to prosecute the long enquiry, although, like any other specialisation, the study of biology or molecular physics would but illuminate one of many side issues, even if he achieved some great discovery. He could never hope to do more than that, of course; to add some tiny contribution to knowledge was all that the greatest mind could hope to accomplish in a lifetime; the deeper the enquiry, the further one departed from the possibility of any synthesis such as that which so completely satisfied his sister. But some instinct of his mind revolted from the thought of an intense specialisation that would rob him of his power of choice. His five years in Austin Friars had shown him that great success in any one activity was not to be achieved without training and concentration; and experimental science would make greater demands upon his powers of absorption than the comparatively wide interests of the money-market. Moreover, he was at present intrigued by this mystery of Halton's place as a symbol in the larger scheme. He must satisfy himself with some explanation of that before he decided upon his future. Recently he had had an idea of making a reasonable fortune within the next ten years and then devoting it to some scheme of education. He had heard that Oakstone had been reorganised under its new head-master, and he meant to go over and see what was being done there. He was home just in time for speech-day. . . .

They had come down the hill into the village before his vague thought arrived at the intention to go to Oakstone, the next day; and the wide-armed church stood now in full elevation, grave, steadfast and kindly, as he had always remembered it.

Eleanor had relapsed into silence after his unseemly reminder that bishops were of the same flesh and blood as other men, but she had evidently been drawing her own inferences from Dickie's speech, for when she spoke, her

tone had the effect of sinking to a final conclusion rather than of seeking information.

"I suppose you never go to church in London," she said.

"I do, often," Dickie replied. "St. Paul's and the Abbey, and St. Alban's, occasionally."

"St. Alban's!" Eleanor repeated. "Isn't that very 'high'?"

Halton certainly had no plain message for Dickie that afternoon.

IV

He found that his father had greatly altered during the last twelve months. The old man was in his seventy-sixth year, but the marks of the change were not those of senility. He had always been thin, but now the hollows in his temples and cheeks were so deep, that the shape of the skull peered through the disguise of the flesh. Yet his eyes and carriage were not those of one whose faculties were being slowly obscured by decay; a stranger might have judged him to be a man of sixty-five, prematurely aged by some vital disease.

"I say, pater, how thin you are," Dickie exclaimed anxiously when he and his father had kissed. For a moment Dickie's strong young hand had rested on a shoulder from which the deltoid appeared to have completely vanished, leaving only some mechanical structure of inexplicable movable bones.

"I don't attend City dinners," the Rector said with a little laugh,—his voice was as sound as ever—and then he went on quickly: "So you're really honouring us with a long visit on this occasion, eh, Dick? And there's another surprise. I suppose Eleanor told you that Adela is coming home at the end of next month?"

"Is she? By Jove! Oh, good! No, Eleanor didn't tell me," exclaimed Dickie in jerks, as he greeted his mother, who held him as if she found some deep consolation in the strength of his body.

"How solid you are, dear," she said, patting him fondly.

"It's eight years since she ran away," put in Eleanor. They had moved into the hall and the dying sound of wheels on the gravel indicated that Archer was out of ear-shot driving the Stanhope round to the stables.

"Edward was married in July, '95," murmured Mrs. Lynneker automatically.

"What about the children?" Dickie asked.

"She is bringing the two youngest with her," Mrs. Lynneker said. "The other three are staying out there with their grandmother. Old Mrs. Oliver is still alive, you know."

The Rector had strayed back to the porch and was regarding Dickie's luggage. "Archer had better come and carry all this upstairs," he said. "There's enough for a voyage round the world."

Dickie laughed. His father had always criticised the quantity of luggage required by the younger generation.

"I'll take it up all right, pater," he said. "Can't manage on the haversack you used to do with."

The Rector did not answer. He wore a look of sudden abstraction as if he had lost the sense of his surroundings.

"There's some lunch waiting for you and Eleanor," Mrs. Lynneker said, grasping the solid consolation of her son's arm. "We've had ours."

"I say, mother, is father ill?" asked Dickie, as he allowed himself to be led into the dining-room.

A faint tinge of added colour came into Mrs. Lynneker's cheeks and she looked round for Eleanor, who had left them and gone upstairs.

"He's so frightfully thin," Dickie persisted.

"He hasn't been well," his mother said hurriedly. "It's his old gastric trouble, he thinks," and she turned her back on him, went over to the other side of the room and rang the bell.

No more was said then, for the Rector had come in from the porch and was standing at the dining-room door.

"Aren't you coming in to watch me eat, father?" Dickie said.

"I must write a letter first; I'll come in presently," his father returned.

"He never likes to sit doing nothing while other people are eating," explained Mrs. Lynneker as if she were describing the habits of a stranger.

The Rector turned and walked across the hall to his study. He shut the door after him with a hesitation that made Dickie wonder if the old man had believed himself dismissed.

"Really he doesn't, dear, not now," his mother was saying anxiously, and when Eleanor came down, a moment later, she was instantly appealed to for confirmation.

"It's his old gastric trouble," Eleanor said. "I'll go and see if there's anything I can get for him."

Dickie noticed that she entered the study without knocking. None of them, not even his mother, had ever done that in the old days.

"Oughtn't he to take advice about it?" he asked when he and his sister were having lunch.

"He has," Eleanor said coldly. "I think you can trust us, Dick, to look after him." She looked defiantly at her mother as if she dared her to speak.

Mrs. Lynneker sat very still and compressed her lips. She wore a look of weak determination and that faint colour shone again in her cheeks, as if she had been detected upon some questionable purpose.

She, too, was thinner, but her loss of flesh was evidently due solely to the shrivelling of age. She stooped a little, now, in her walk, and her shoulders were rounded. At sixty-six she looked in many ways older than her husband. He appeared to be fighting a visible enemy; she was succumbing infinitely slowly, without apprehension.

Indeed, at tea-time, the Rector was almost sprightly. He drank only part of a cup of very weak tea, into which he sopped a few crumbs of thin bread and butter, but he talked eagerly of his boy's prospects. If it had not been for that startling emaciation, no one would have noticed any change in him. Not once during the meal did Dickie

catch another sight of that air of abstracted foreboding his father had worn for a moment as he stood staring at the luggage in the porch.

"I've come home for a long rest in order to make a decision, you see," Dickie explained in answer to one of his father's questions. He thought this would be a good opportunity to put his problem before them, once and for all, while they were together and had their attention focussed upon him. He expected no help from them, but he wished his father and mother to understand his dilemma.

"Lessing has offered me a kind of partnership," he went on, "and I don't want to accept it until I see my way quite clearly."

"Does he impose difficult conditions?" the Rector asked, and the other two looked at the champion of their fortunes with the same air of puzzled wonder that they and the rest of the family had worn in that room eight years earlier, when the graceful Martyn had so charmingly suggested that this youngest of the Lynnekers need stop short at nothing less than the Premiership.

Dickie stumbled over his reply. "No, he doesn't, exactly; it's just the conditions imposed by—by everything," he said. He saw himself again as the eager boy of twenty, and remembering all his old desires and solidity of purpose, he had an uneasy feeling that the youth had a finer sense of values than the man.

"But what conditions . . ." Mrs. Lynneker began, and then gave place to her husband, who asked, "Wouldn't a partnership with Mr. Lessing give you an assured income?"

"Oh, yes, of course, there's money in it," Dickie said, frowning.

The Rector moved uneasily in his chair. "It isn't the chief ambition of life, certainly," he admitted. "At the same time . . . it is . . . a means. . . ." He stooped over his tea-cup and fished up a fragment of soaked bread and butter with his spoon.

"I've got enough to live on, you know," Dickie said, and

they all looked at him with something in their faces between relief and amazement.

It was Eleanor who put the essential question for them.

"What do you call enough to live on, Dick?" she asked.

"About five hundred a year," Dickie said, trying to take their estimate of a competence which would have appeared so insignificant in Austin Friars.

"But, dear, how . . .?" gasped Mrs. Lynneker.

"Lessing has been awfully good to me; always putting me on to things and giving me commissions on deals and so on," Dickie explained. "It's easy enough to make money when you're in with a man like Lessing. As a matter of fact, I could have made a lot more if I'd bothered about it."

"More than this living is worth nowadays!" commented Mr. Lynneker in an undertone.

His wife, drooping over the tea-tray, seemed to brood on the fundamental injustice of the distribution of wealth. "But, dear, what do you suppose you'd get if you accepted this partnership?" was the outcome of her meditations.

"Couldn't say, exactly," Dickie replied. "We haven't come down to a question of figures; I don't suppose we should in any case. Lessing never knows from day to day what he's worth; it depends on the day's prices, you understand."

"But you must know . . . about . . ." his mother insisted.

"Well, it wouldn't be less than three or four thousand a year anyway," Dickie said, mentioning a safe minimum, "but it's chiefly a question of what was doing and what opportunities he gave me. He says that I'll never make a first-rate business man,—not keen enough,—but he wants me because he says I'm safe. He trusts me to represent him in all his more substantial business affairs, you know. I've got rather a good memory for figures and important facts. You'd be surprised what a lot of room there is for a particular kind of scholarship in business."

"Wouldn't you *like* to earn three or four thousand a year, dear?" his mother asked in a slightly awed voice. It was

so long since the conception of such a magnificent income had been material for her day-dreams.

"Don't know quite what I should do with it," Dickie said. "I've thought of making a lot of money quickly and starting an education scheme. I'm going over to Oakstone tomorrow for the speech-day; I want to see what they're doing there, now, under Moseley. It's altered a bit since my time, I believe."

Eleanor got up, took away her father's cup and patted the cushion at the back of his chair. He accepted her fussing with a slight irritation, but he did not actually forbid it. "It's quite all right, dear, quite all right," he said, and leaned back so that she could not interfere further.

She stood for a minute behind him, with her thin, rather graceful hands resting on the back of his chair.

"Not *religious* education, I suppose?" she said, looking down at her brother.

"Not particularly," Dickie admitted, and for a time the conversation was diverted by a parenthesis of the Rector's, devoted to the evils that must arise from the lack of religious education in the National School which he had been unable to keep out of Halton.

Mrs. Lynneker brought them back to a sense of the immediate problem by saying cheerfully, "Well, at all events, we've got three months to talk about it. We ought to be able to decide something in that time."

"That's what I thought," agreed Dickie.

"You could do so much on three or four thousand a year," his mother urged, by way of leaving a fruitful suggestion in his mind; and although the obvious quotation must have been at the tip of Eleanor's tongue, she did not speak. The reference would not have hurt her brother, who displayed no signs of "loving money" in any way whatever; and she was certainly not anxious to champion the views of an atheist. But, in her own words, Dickie was "the most upsetting person" she knew. She could not even convincingly picture him condemned to eternal punishment.

"Well, well, we shall see," the Rector said as he got up to go to his study.

His walk was certainly more feeble than it had been a year ago, but he impatiently refused Eleanor's assistance. Nevertheless she followed him out of the room.

Dickie looked questioningly at his mother.

"Are you quite sure it's only gastric?" he asked.

Mrs. Lynneker set her lips in their old weakly determined line.

"You mustn't ask me anything more about it," she said. She looked as if she were on the verge of tears.

And then Eleanor came back, a little hurriedly, as if she had been afraid to leave those two alone.

v

Dickie knew that his mother wished to make full confidence and that Eleanor was no less anxious for the secret, whatever it was, to be kept from him. Eleanor had certainly altered (or was it developed?) very rapidly in five years. He had been too absorbed to note the growing difference in her during those week-end visits of his. And it seemed now that he had been inexcusably thoughtless in his attitude towards Halton since he had been away. Halton had always appeared so enduring, he had grown into the habit of assuming that it would go on, unaltered, until he had time to attend to it. Since he had been able to solve the old financial anxieties for his father and mother, he had pictured them growing older, but not dangerously older, in comfort.

He was shocked to find that he had probably come home too late. He had waived his right to interfere, and Eleanor, at least, was unwilling to reinstate him. He was not dismayed by her opposition; he intended to make Eleanor herself tell him the truth about his father that evening—if he chose the easier course of making an assignation with his mother, she would certainly confess, but she would prob-

ably blame herself later and be painfully reproached by her daughter. What discomforted him was the fact that his father himself was playing on the other side; as if he, too, felt that Dickie had gone out of the life of Halton and was henceforth to be regarded as a privileged friend who must be spared any such painful news as might spoil the pleasure of his visit.

Walking up and down the front lawn before supper, under the immediate surveillance of that grey, calm church, Dickie felt that he had much ground to recover before he could hope to read the secret of Halton. . . .

The disclosure of the true facts concerning his father's illness, however, was precipitated by an incident at the supper-table.

The Rector's meal was made up of a basin of rather thin "Revelenta," into which he soaked a few crumbs of bread. He hesitated over it from the first.

"She makes this stuff too thick," he said.

Eleanor immediately got up and examined the preparation, stirring it attentively and testing the consistency of it.

"I think not, dear," she decided firmly. "You really must get more nourishment."

Her father seemed to acquiesce from sheer inertia, or because he preferred not to raise any discussion before his son.

And then, before the basin of "Revelenta" was half finished, he put his napkin to his mouth, got up quickly from the table and left the room. Dickie heard him go out of the front door and presently return to his own study.

Eleanor, after an obvious moment of vacillation, also left the table and went to her father.

"Does that stuff make him sick?" asked Dickie bluntly.

His mother shook her head. She kept her eyes down and would not look at him.

"What is the trouble, then?" Dickie insisted.

Mrs. Lynneker was full of distress. "You ought to know," she said.

"I *must* know," Dickie returned. "I must ask Eleanor."

"She'll never tell you," Mrs. Lynneker said.

"She will," Dickie replied calmly. "Why shouldn't she?"

Mrs. Lynneker drooped despondently over her plate. "She manages everything now," she said. "I daresay it's better that she should. She's very capable in some ways. But I'm not sure that your father likes to be interfered with so much. He has always hated anything like a fuss." She stopped abruptly at the sound of the study door.

Eleanor came back alone.

"Father says that he'll come in after supper," she announced with an assumption of calmness. "Emma made the Revelenta too thick to-night. I must tell her about it."

She sat down and looked defiantly back at her brother, who was steadily staring at her across the table.

"I want to know, Eleanor," he said quietly. His face wore a look of obstinacy that was familiar enough to a few financiers in the City of London. "When you see that cub of Lessing's settle himself down to it, you may just as well start another hand," one of the lesser lights of company promoting had said on a certain occasion,—he was certainly sore at the time,—and he would have decided that the "cub" had settled himself down to extort the truth now from his sister.

"There is nothing to know," she said, and tried first to hold her brother's stare and then to release herself from it. Her thin, graceful hands were passionately clenched together in her lap.

"Is there a growth?" asked Dickie.

"What is it to do with you?" she said bitterly.

"Is there a growth?" repeated Dickie. There was something brutal in the flat repetition of his question. It seemed as if he were capable of continuing for all time that single, remorseless enquiry without change of phrase or tone.

The tears sprang to Eleanor's eyes as if she were, indeed, suffering great physical torture. "I won't tell you. . . . I won't tell you," she gasped.

"You have told me," Dickie said, and he slightly pushed

back his chair and, as it were, released her. "Where is it? Isn't an operation possible?" he asked.

Eleanor sat quite still. The strain had been relaxed, but she had been wrung and twisted and could find no alleviation for her pain. Her head fell a little forward and her breath panted as if she had been running.

"You take everything and give nothing," she said at last in a low voice. "You come down, a stranger, and try to steal everything from us. You're obstinate and cruel and you abuse your strength for your own purposes." Then she looked up with a new access of courage and went on: "Mother can tell you if she likes; *I* won't—never! Never. And I won't let you interfere with him—you think you can take him from me, too, but you can't. He's dependent on me. He wants me." Her tears choked her, but as she went out of the room, she turned and said: "He didn't want you to *know*. He asked me and mother not to say anything *to* you."

"It must have been an awful strain for you two," Dickie said tenderly when his sister had gone, and he got up and kissed his mother affectionately.

She clung to him with weak passion. "I don't mind so much, now you know," she said. "Eleanor is so—hard."

VI

"Shall we go into the other room?" Dickie suggested.

He was aware of an anxiety to get away from the associations of the supper-table. Eleanor's unexpected hysteria had deepened the emotion that surrounded the realisation of his father's fatal illness; and all the pathetic evidences of little material things were full of sadness. The basin of half-finished "Revelenta," the spoon laid down so hastily that it had fallen on the cloth; Eleanor's untidy plate, were all symbols of intense human disturbance, marking the sharp intrusion of tragedy.

"Have you finished, dear?" his mother asked. "You had

such a makeshift dinner." She looked regretfully at an untouched jelly, finding her pathos in the thought that it had been made especially for him.

He nodded, holding out his hand to help her to her feet, and as they went across the hall and down the long passage to the drawing-room, he put his arm about her as if she needed his physical support. He was conscious of his strength and independence as of a barrier between him and some indefinable thing that he was ardently seeking.

"Your being here is such a comfort to me," his mother said, when she had sat down on the old sofa in the same seat from which she had made confession to him of her debt to the Loan Company. "You've always been a comfort to me," she added. "None of the others could understand."

Dickie sat by her and took her hand in his. "I want you to tell me all about the pater," he said. The old term seemed inevitable in those circumstances.

"It began months ago," his mother replied. "He found he could not eat things like potato, it wouldn't go down, and he had to get up as he did to-night and get rid of it. And you know what he is, he wouldn't tell any one. . . ."

"Not even Eleanor?" put in Dickie.

"He didn't tell either of us till he was obliged to. We couldn't help noticing that something serious was wrong, of course, and Eleanor was always asking him what it was. He told me first about two months ago, weeks after he'd seen Dr. Price in Medborough,—he'd never said a word about having seen him till then,—and then he told me it was quite hopeless, only a question of time, and that nothing whatever could be done. Dr. Price had told him that he might live a year, or even longer if he would consent to be fed artificially."

"He won't submit to that, I suppose?" Dickie asked.

"He says not, but don't you think he ought?" His mother returned a little querulously.

Dick's lips were screwed into a thoughtful pout. Why,

after all, he asked himself, should his father's torture be unnecessarily prolonged?

"Couldn't you say something about it?" Mrs. Lynneker persisted.

The lamp had not been brought in; the July dusk was warm with the smell of the roses that climbed all over the front of the house. And the familiar scent carried Dickie back through all the old associations; the sound of the organ's rumbling and the attention that was necessary to catch the air if one would be sure whether that was positively the hymn after the sermon—he could see his mother's listening face and the look of triumph that came to her when she could catch up the tune and soundlessly frame the words of the hymn with her lips;—then the hush that preceded the voluntary, and later the sound of Eleanor and Adela talking as they came up the gravel path; and the sight of his father in cassock and mortar-board, carrying his surplice over his arm, and hurrying a little as he always did when he was in his canonicals. It seemed so impossible that that long routine could ever be finally broken. How long had his father been Rector of Halton? Thirty-six or seven years. . . .

"Don't you think he ought, dear?" his mother repeated after a long pause.

"I don't know why he should," Dickie replied absently.

"It seems so . . . so . . ." Mrs. Lynneker began and could not find words to express her own longing to live, in terms of an abstract rectitude.

"He keeps on doing his best in the normal way," Dickie explained. "I can understand how he'd hate to have his body interfered with—being fed through a beastly tube, just for the sake of a few weeks more agony."

"I know, he has always been like that," Mrs. Lynneker said in a tone that seemed to accuse her husband of an old, resented peculiarity.

"I think I should be like that, too," Dickie concluded.

"He hates one to notice it," Mrs. Lynneker added, following her own line of thought.

And then their talk was interrupted by the climax of the tenor bell, sounding a solitary, penetrating call to the ringers.

"Oh, they can't be going to practise to-night," Mrs. Lynneker gasped in horror. "Do you think it's because you've come home?"

"Much more likely because it's their last chance before harvest," Dickie thought.

A minute or two later the Rector came in with a fine assumption of cheerfulness. "All in the dark?" he said. "I'll ring for the lamp. They're going to celebrate Dick's return, I think."

Eleanor, pale and composed, had joined them before the ringing clamour of the full peal filled the drawing-room with a reverberation that made conversation impossible.

"At least, let us have the windows shut," pleaded Mrs. Lynneker with her hands to her ears.

The Rector was leaning back in his arm-chair with a faint smile of enjoyment on his face. Possibly the sound of the bells carried him into the living past, as the smell of roses had carried Dickie.

VII

Mr. Lynneker had almost given up smoking during the last two months, but he still potted about the house, sometimes for more than an hour after prayers. That evening, however, he reverted to his old habit.

"You haven't begun to smoke, yet, Dick?" he asked.

"No, not yet," Dickie said, smiling.

"Quite right; it's a lazy habit," his father returned, paused a moment and then added: "But you won't be going to bed for half an hour, I presume?"

"I hardly ever go before twelve," Dickie said. "I brought a few books down. . . ."

"Ah! well, I think I shall have one cigarette to-night," Mr. Lynneker announced, and disregarding Eleanor's pro-

test, he went on: "I've come down to cigarettes,—a pipe is a little too strong for me nowadays. I shall find you in the dining-room, eh? It will be a little chilly outside. . . ."

"I suppose mother told you everything," Eleanor said coldly, when her father had gone out of the room.

"All she knew," Dickie said. "I'm going to see Price to-morrow."

"It's no use," Eleanor returned. "It's no use at all, your interfering."

"Dear old girl, I'm not going to interfere," expostulated Dickie.

"I know you think we ought to have let you know," Eleanor continued, overlooking his interruption, "and that you'll say we ought to have taken other advice, and so on. I daresay you believe that it would never have happened if you'd been at home." She paused and looked at him and there was a shade of doubt in her expression, as if behind all her defiance, she was fearful of the reproach that she might have done more.

"I certainly want to know what Price has to say about it," Dickie admitted.

"Dr. Price can't tell you anything that I don't know," Eleanor said. "He'll tell you that it might have been possible to operate. Perhaps it was, *then*; but we didn't know, then. Father didn't tell us anything at the time, and we couldn't have *made* him undergo an operation, even if we had known."

"You needn't be so defensive," Dickie put in.

"You always know so much better than any one else," Eleanor retorted.

Dickie took no notice of that. He was trying to understand Eleanor's grievance, not to champion his own attitude; and he failed to realise that his indifference to her attacks upon him was aggravating her sense of injury.

"It's almost certainly too late to operate now," he said.

"And you blame me for not having guessed sooner, so that I might have got your help and insisted upon an operation

three or four months ago." The thin suggestion of a question still underlay the bitterness of her voice.

"How can I tell you that before I have heard what Price says?" asked Dickie.

She turned away from him as if she could no longer endure the effort of opposition. "Hadn't you better go?" she said. "He's waiting for you in the dining-room. I'll put out the lamp. I always lock up now, but perhaps you'd like to do it while you're at home." She spoke quickly, wilfully exposing all her grievance against him, but as Dickie was leaving the room, she suddenly flared out again.

"Perhaps you'd better see Dr. Price," she said. "After all, you've earned the right. You've helped us—with money."

As Dickie waited for his father in the dining-room, he wondered what could be done to soften his sister's jealousy, and whether it might not be better for him to go away if his father were likely to be upset by Eleanor's bitterness. But then, what of his mother? She, too, had a claim on the comfort of his presence. "Comfort" was her own word, and he knew that it was apt.

And when his father came, he made it quite clear that he, too, desired his boy's presence in the house during the next three months. He evidently had something to say that he found it difficult to approach and he led up to it by that statement.

"It will be a great relief to me having you here, Dick," he said. He leaned a little forward in his chair and automatically passed his hands backwards and forwards over his thin knees. He had laid his still unlighted cigarette on the table, but as he stared contemplatively down at the empty grate, it seemed as if in imagination he was still smoking the little light pipe cut out of a single piece of myall wood that he had always affected. Occasionally his lips moved as if he were blowing out smoke.

"Your mother and I were both so glad you could come for a long holiday," he went on, trying to approach that difficult statement of his without emotion. "And there are

one or two little business affairs I should like to consult you about. At my age one has to think of these things. I have made you my trustee. You're better up in business matters than Edward or Latimer."

"Those Bank shares are at a good premium again," Dickie remarked in order to fill the pause. He had advised his father to buy more stock in the City & County when prices were down at the beginning of the Boer war, and had lent him over £2,000 for that purpose.

The Rector nodded. "I have left the interest on all that stock to your mother and Eleanor for life," he said. "The capital will revert to you, eventually, of course. . . . It's been a great relief to me, Dick, to know that your mother and sister were provided for. . . . And there is quite a little sum on deposit at the Bank now. We have hardly been living up to our income for the past three years. I should like to give you a cheque for £100 for immediate expenses. . . ." He was very near the difficult topic now and his attention was riveted more firmly than ever on the fireplace. "It will be a great convenience for you to have ready money at—at that time. . . ."

"There's no need for that," Dickie mumbled. He was embarrassed by his uncertainty as to whether his father desired his illness to be openly referred to between them. "I shall open an account with the City & County while I'm down here, and, of course, I shall be quite able to provide for the mater and Eleanor."

The Rector's hands paused for a moment in their slow, steady movement and he gripped them together as he went on, taking no notice of his son's assurances. "Price thinks it will only be a matter of weeks now. I can't talk of these things to your mother and Eleanor, but I want you to know." And then he used his phrase for the third time. "It will be a great relief when it's all over," he said with the ghost of a little laugh, and his hands fell again to their automatic rubbing of his thin knees.

"I wish I had been . . ." Dickie began almost in a whisper, and could find no phrase for his regret. His father

sought relief as his mother sought comfort, and relief could only come by way of release.

Moreover, Dickie knew that the old man had no wish to talk of his illness. He had always had an unusual delicacy in speaking of the functions of his body, and now he would nurse this last disturbance privately, secretly; he would strive until the end to maintain the fiction that he was suffering from no unusual interference with the common routine of physical life. The single method by which the son could convey either sympathy or understanding was by silence; his father would appreciate that. And, indeed, he seemed to mark the quiet interval, as if he gave his congregation a few moments of quiet prayer after the blessing. When he spoke again his voice took on a more conventional tone and emphasised the change of topic. The difficult announcement had been made and that was the end of it. Dick understood.

VIII

"I used to think at one time that you might make a figure in political life," he said, "but perhaps it's better not. A man in a high position must often be compelled to act against his conscience. I can almost find it in me to hope now that you won't be too successful."

"Yes. If only one could get a clear direction," Dickie said.

"That will come, that will come," his father assured him, and if they thought of the agent in different terms, their intention gave them common ground. "Haven't you any solid plans at present?" the Rector asked.

"No, I haven't. That was why I came down here," Dickie said. He understood that his father wanted him to talk, and he made an effort to satisfy him. "Business life is pretty beastly in some ways," he went on, "and at the time one doesn't notice it. One is too keyed up. And then there are always two sides to it, if you look deep enough.

You remember that affair down here with the Loan Company at Medborough? Of course, you do. Well, that kind of theory keeps cropping up all the time."

"Go on, my boy, go on," the Rector prompted him, and stretched out his hand and took up the long neglected cigarette. Now that his announcement had been received without a fuss, he could compose himself to listen to his son's stories. Except for occasional fits of deep abstraction that he seemed unable to guard against, the Rector's mind had been unusually clear lately.

"Oh, it wasn't anything particular," Dickie said. "Just another thing very like the Smith business. I am thinking of a fellow called Jennings, the ordinary type of small company promoter, rather cock-sure, and cunning in a way, a chap who was letting in all sorts of small investors. And, well, we pushed him up and broke him. I took it on at the beginning chiefly with the idea that we were doing rather a good thing for the small investor, generally; but it's true that he was in our way, rather."

"Scoundrel!" commented the Rector softly. He had had experience from the point of view of the small investor. Crockford's information supplies an excellent register for the forwarding of prospectuses.

"Yes, he was, of course," Dickie admitted, "but I found that he had about ten people dependent on him. He came to me and pitched no end of a story and I went up to his house at Highbury one night and found that it was perfectly true. He had a wife and five children and a mother and two sisters, and was being jolly decent to them all."

The Rector looked up sympathetically and clicked his tongue. "What did you do, Dick?" he asked.

"Well, I put it to Jennings next day that he'd broken up a few jolly little homes like his own at one time and another, and he argued it out a bit at first, and then gave in and said he had never thought of it like that before and that it would be a lesson to him and all that kind of stuff; and I gave him a credit and let him in on a good thing,

and six months afterwards he was back at his old game again."

"Dear, dear, what became of him?" asked the Rector.

"He went a bit too near the bone, and had to clear out," Dickie said. "His family just manage to keep things going. Lessing has been very decent to them. He's like that. But the point is, you see, pater, that you can't help these things. It's all very well to say that you can choose some business in which you are doing as little harm as possible to anybody else, but that's only shirking the responsibility. Chaps like Jennings go on downing somebody or being downed themselves just the same, and you might just as well be doing it yourself for all the good you are."

The Rector threw away the last third of his cigarette and stared thoughtfully into the empty grate. His hands were still now, clasped together between his knees.

"You'll find a way, Dick," he remarked after a long pause.

"It's only the personal problem I want to solve, you know," Dickie explained, following out his own line of thought. "I've no use for the high-falutin' reform business. It's all right if you think you've got a mission, of course; but I know I haven't." He ruffled his hair with his old boyish gesture as he concluded: "I just want to find my line, whatever it may be. I'm not sure my old idea of being an astronomer wasn't as good as anything. Gives one a chance of just plugging away. . . ."

"You'll find your line," his father repeated softly, and had a vision of his old dreams, a little changed.

"You're going over there to-morrow?" he said.

"To Oakstone? Yes," Dickie answered. "I thought I should like to go into Medborough to see Price first, if you don't mind."

"Did Eleanor ask you to do that?" his father asked, looking up quickly.

"On the contrary, she asked me not to."

"It will serve no purpose," the Rector said with something of his old irritation. "I had gastric fever when I was

in my first curacy; I've always thought it might return in some form or another."

"It was only for my own satisfaction," Dickie explained.

The Rector got to his feet with an obvious effort. "Well, well," he said, "you must do as you think best. Now, my boy, are you going upstairs?"

Dickie wondered if it were possible that his father did not know what was the cause of the trouble. If he believed that his affection was gastric and not due to a malignant growth, it seemed better to allow him to continue in ignorance. There was something less evil, less threatening in the idea of that old illness returned in another form.

IX

And Dr. Price was a trifle vague in his diagnosis when questioned by Dickie the next morning.

"It isn't absolutely certain," Price said, "that it's a case of cancer. We recognise a malignant stricture of the œsophagus not due to the pressure of an outside growth, and yet not susceptible to enlargement by a bougie."

"In that case he might be kept alive for years, possibly, by artificial feeding?" suggested Dickie.

"I suggested gastrotomy to your father when he saw me," Price returned, "but he absolutely refused to consider the idea of an operation. And in any case it would be of doubtful value. He is seventy-six, I believe."

"Nearly," Dickie agreed.

"By the way," he added, "does my father know your diagnosis? Last night he spoke of gastric trouble."

"The malignant stricture I mentioned might quite well be the consequence of an old ulceration due to some form of gastritis," Price said.

"On the other hand, it may be cancer?"

"I think it more probable."

"But you didn't tell him that?"

"No, I believe not," Dr. Price said.

Dickie went on to Oakstone, feeling a little relieved. The fiction of the old gastric trouble had some foundation after all and it seemed curiously a more amenable thing than that other horrible enemy.

XIV

THE NEW OAKSTONE

I

THE change in Oakstone was so far reaching that the influence of it was visible at the North Western station at Medborough, fifteen miles away. The "Oakstone" train was being advertised by flurried porters to the complete neglect of Peterborough which was the train's important destination. It was true that Dickie, who had not revisited the school since he had left it eleven years before, had never seen that side of speech-day which began at Medborough; but he knew that this crowd on the platform was greater than any he had seen collected in the Oakstone schoolroom; and these people only represented the London contingent who had come across from the Great Northern station,—a group slightly inflated, perhaps, by the fathers, mothers and sisters of Medborough itself. And not only was the crowd greater than it used to be, it was also of a different quality. The parents seemed to average a higher level of importance than those Dickie remembered. He recognised Evan Williams, who was sure of a seat in the Cabinet when the Liberals came into power, and A. B. Ellis, the novelist, both public men and both associated with that inclination towards new ideas and standards which was just beginning to discover a definite outline. Ellis, particularly, was always being bracketed with Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells as an exponent of what was presently to become a new literature. In the old days the quality of the speech-day visitors had been recognisably conservative.

Dickie had heard something of Moseley's drastic changes

during the eight years of his head-mastership, but the information had always been given disparagingly, with a hint of regret that the good old tradition of the school should be sacrificed. Behind any report of increasing numbers and the development of the "Modern" side, had lingered the suggestion that Oakstone was losing "tone." Edward had said as much explicitly the last time Dickie had seen him, some three years ago.

"I don't go there now," Edward had added. "It isn't the same school since Moseley has been there. He's modernising the whole place—science laboratories and workshops and that sort of thing, you know."

Dickie had exhibited a fleeting interest at the time, and then had forgotten all about it, until he had evolved out of his own experience the ghost of a scheme for a new method in education. When that scheme occurred to him, he remembered that "something was being done" at Oakstone.

Even on the Medborough platform he had a glimpse of the radical quality of Moseley's changes. . . .

What that change stood for, he found it difficult to say with any precision while he was in the midst of all the new circumstance that surrounded the school. For everything about the place had been affected, even the station, a mile out of the town, had become more alert. The two large waggonettes and the other conveyances that had come to meet the train were new,—in the old days one omnibus and a few dilapidated "flies" were all that the town could inadequately provide for the visitors, the majority of whom trailed in a thin procession over that dull mile of untidy, partly urbanised road into Oakstone.

And the town itself was evidently on the way to regeneration. Once it had hidden the school under its skirts as an offspring of which it was a little ashamed. Now the child was nearly full-grown and the mother leaned upon it. The old town had come to exist for the sake of the school, to thrive upon it, and after all the centuries of its own slow existence, to grow. On the hill were new spaces round

the school-buildings, and the new schoolhouse, and the new range of laboratories and workshops that had formerly been the old schoolhouse. Up there was a nucleus that had once been an unconsidered extension; and on the farther side of the nucleus was the rest of the school, recently built, or building, collecting the other "houses" that in Dickie's day had been hidden away, dingy and inconvenient, in various parts of the town; surrounded now by playing fields that he had known as market gardens or pasturage.

So much alteration might have implied almost miraculous powers on the part of Mr. Moseley, if his appointment had not been made a few months after the death of old Lord Bingley, the chairman of the trustees. That change in the over-lordship of the funds had revealed the fact of a large surplus of wealth, theoretically announced in detail from year to year, but actually concealed by the mere prestige attaching to the Earl's name. The nephew who succeeded was a man of affairs, and if Moseley had not been full of energy and initiative the whole reserve of funds would probably have fallen into the ever-open maw of the Charity Commissioners. The old board of trustees had displayed an amazing ignorance of their accounts and would have been quite willing to hand them over to the larger authority. They had trusted implicitly to Lord Bingley, who had trusted his solicitor, who simply had not bothered. And it had been nobody's business to investigate. But there was the money to be spent on the School, and Moseley was the right man to direct the spending. He had found a capable lieutenant in young Lord Bingley.

Yet in Oakstone, as in Paris, London and Halton, Dickie found still the old note of protest against the too rapid insurgence of all this young growth. The sixteenth century town hall stood unaltered, an island memorial of the past among the rebuilding shops of the market-place. And the long, thin neck of the over-crocketed church spire seemed to strain a little impatiently upward in order to claim attention for its age and influence among all this bright, clean spread of modern architecture. (A. B. Ellis, who was

fond of a whimsical touch in his metaphor, had likened the spire to the neck of a giraffe in a pen. "The boast of these prehistoric survivals," he had added reflectively, "has a curious attraction. We must keep a few of them to remind us of what we once were.")

II

The marks of the change were not so clearly defined in the big hall that on such occasions as these was contrived from the two junior class-rooms. The school-buildings were not quite recent in date. They marked a transition period that had promised reform and failed to accomplish it, in the days immediately preceding the appointment of Dr. Barnard. There had been a movement, then; but so far as Oakstone was concerned, the movement had only been an uneasy rocking that had gradually tottered to rest on the old base.

The influence of the town hall and the church was still visible in the Oakstone scheme of education. Moseley might have ambitions and might be working steadily to express them, but he was wise enough to move slowly, clear-headed enough not to run too far ahead of his generation. He had either to consider the necessity for compromise, or risk the loss of his material. In that generation, his most difficult task was to educate the parents of his boys.

An example of his method might be found in the fact that the Greek play was still an item on the speech-day programme. The sixth did a scene from Aristophanes instead of from Æschylus, and the performance was cut down from half-an-hour to ten minutes. But all the donnish and clerical fathers, and they were a distinguishable element in the crowd, were appeased by this salute to tradition. They could defend themselves against the criticism of friends who scoffed at the "new-fangled" ideas of Oakstone, by instancing that Greek play, even though it were

as remote from its surroundings as the old town hall among the recent litter of the market-place.

As Dickie walked into the familiar rooms that had been the scene of his earlier struggles with the Latin primer, some one came up behind him and touched his arm.

"Young Mr. Lynneker, isn't it?" a voice asked, and Dickie turned to discover Mr. Bailey, retired ironmonger and ex-mayor of Medborough. He still wore a flat-crowned felt hat of the same pattern that Dickie distinctly associated with that first morning of his clerkship. Mr. Bailey had put him in his place, on that occasion.

"Come to have a look at the old school, eh?" Bailey asked when they had shaken hands. "Altered a bit since your day, ain't it? Well, where you goin' to sit? I'm all alone. You heard, no doubt, as my wife died six years back?"

"My boy's here, now. Won a prize for mechanics," he continued when they had found places. "Got a taste for engineerin', playin' with the tools in my old shop. I sold the business in '98. Ah! yes, you hadn't left home then. Claude, you remember him, perhaps" (Dickie remembered him as a stringy boy of eleven or twelve with outstanding pink ears, but did not particularise this mental vision), "well, he didn't get on at the Kings School. From the Reverend Hammond's reports of him, you might a-thought the boy was little better nor an idiot. And Claude, he was crazy to go into the railway shops, but I meant him to have a proper education, somehow. I'd made a bit of money, and I meant as he should profit by it. . . ."

The Hall was filling rapidly and Dickie, bending an apparently attentive ear to the ironmonger's story, allowed his interest to wander while the complicated narrative of Mr. Bailey's introduction to Oakstone was unfolded.

"He's done first-rate here," Mr. Bailey concluded rather abruptly, and lowering his voice as Mr. Moseley stood up at the front of the dais. "Prize for mechanics," he whispered penetratingly through the hush that announced the opening speech.

"Splendid," Dickie murmured.

The programme of the prize-giving did not differ greatly from those he remembered, but the performance had been sharpened up. If a boy had won more than one prize, he took them all at once—if he could carry them—and was not dragged up half-a-dozen separate times. And when he considered it, Dickie saw that even this abbreviation of the tedious proceedings had a secondary intention. The boy, and not the subject, was the principal consideration. It was no longer "sixth-form prize, Collins primus"; and later Dr. Barnard with a whimsical twist of his mouth saying, "Latin verse prize; I'm afraid we must trouble the inimitable Collins primus once more"; but Mr. Moseley, brief and sharp, "Collins primus takes . . ." and then the tale of his achievement, and Collins was placed and finished with. There was some recognisable order of precedence from the sixth downwards, an order not of subjects but of scholars; and incidentally it was to be observed that the order was known to the prize-winners themselves. Each appeared from the immediate proximity of the dais when his name was called, and descended on the other side, free, then, to join his people and watch the further proceedings without interruption. Moseley certainly had a talent for organisation. The actual performance of the ceremony for a school of nearly 300 boys took little more than half the time occupied in Barnard's day for a school of 170.

After Claude Bailey with his peaked, listening face and obtrusively articulated limbs had passed attentively across the platform, and the third edition of Clerk Maxwell's "Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism" had been deposited with his father, Dickie was able to obtain a little more generalised information from the hitherto absorbed ironmonger. Claude had retired once more into some obscurity of boys, but Mr. Bailey had a few shrewd remarks to make about Oakstone as a school.

"What I can make of it," was his summary, "is that Mr. Moseley don't believe in packing all boys with the same stuffing. Claude, now, was no good at history and geog-

raphy and that kind o' thing, but he's got a taste for mucking about with tools and somehow Mr. Moseley has worked on that, and Claude has picked up his figuring and a lot of other things incidental, as it were. He never cared for French and German, for instance, till he found as there was books about electricity in them languages as he'd got to read if he was to get on. All seems to work together with Claude, you see; he don't mind what trouble he takes so long as it's got something to do with engines."

"Specialising," commented Dickie.

"And a good thing, too, in these days," Mr. Bailey replied. "You can't begin too early, with all this competition."

"But there must be a large proportion of boys who haven't any particular bent at this age," Dickie objected.

"Oh! like enough," Mr. Bailey said, obviously thankful that Claude was not of their number.

Dickie wondered whether Moseley would have made him an astronomer. It seemed to him that that occupation, too, might lead in these days to an intense specialisation. In the twentieth century one discovered, not new planets, but some delicate improvement in, say, the spectrohelio-graph.

He sighed and turned his attention to the dais. Ellis and Evan Williams were up there, and the Conservative member who had succeeded to Medborough when Lord William March had unexpectedly come into the peerage; and other evidently distinguished people who were unknown to Dickie.

"Who is the woman in grey?" he asked his companion.

"Lady Constance, the Bishop's wife," Mr. Bailey said; "the young lady with her is Miss Sibyl Groome, her niece, you know, the daughter of the Honourable Philip Groome, Lady Constance's brother. He's an invalid, smashed up hunting, they say, and goes about in a bath-chair, mostly. They're stayin' at the Palace."

Mr. Bailey displayed a proper pride in the accuracy

of his information, and picked out a few more local celebrities for the purposes of biography.

Dickie was looking round for a way of escape from the further proliferations of the ceremony. He was tired of this indirect method. He wanted to talk to Moseley. Unfortunately Mr. Bailey had tucked them into the middle of a row. For a time he amused himself with a speculation as to whether the neat-faced, blonde little man sitting near Lady Constance could be the admirable Hudson who was so well-informed on the subject of Dædalus, and had been, according to report, the cleverest boy that Oakstone, under Barnard, had ever turned out. Dickie decided that it must be Hudson, and determined to accost him later and ask what fame his cleverness had won for him.

His eye dwelt for a moment with a touch of shy hesitation on the figure of Lady Constance's niece. Her face seemed vaguely familiar to him.

III

Mr. Bailey announced that he was not going to the Headmaster's for lunch, but meant to take Claude to "The Lamb" and reward his industry by a substantial feed; and Dickie, having seen his late companion make his diligent way out of the Hall with a volume of Clerk Maxwell under each arm, sauntered up to the dais just in time to catch "young Hudson"—the old habit of address was suppressed just in time.

Hudson, it appeared, was still being brilliant. Dickie's direct questions elicited the facts that he had been "lucky enough" to get a fellowship at Balliol, and "was doing a new translation of Plotinus." Dickie inferred that at twenty-six Hudson could regard his future with comfortable assurance. The large possibilities of Oxford held no dignity or emolument to which he might not aspire.

"What do you think of Moseley?" Dickie asked, when he had satisfied his curiosity under the first head.

"You would hardly expect me to be very appreciative," Hudson said with the neat smile, which so well expressed the precision of his well-informed mind. "You have followed the line of this development, no doubt."

"No, I can't say that I have," Dickie admitted. "What is it?"

"Speaking broadly," Hudson indicated the emptying school-rooms with a white, slender hand, "this is an attempt to compete with the secondary, technical education of the Council schools. Once the principle of free education was firmly established, technical education was certain to follow. You remember what Fitch said, that the 'habit of the English people regards education as a body of expedients to be discovered empirically'; well, our experiments landed us in the position of having to compete with the boys from the National Schools, particularly in such professions as engineering in its various branches. *Hunc illae machinae!*" He gave his neat smile again to point the mild jest. "You see, my dear Lynneker," he continued, "the new Oakstone is nothing more nor less than an attempt at democratisation. It means that the ruling classes are taking off their coats and trying to compete with the mechanic—an attempt which I believe is foredoomed to failure."

"I think you're speaking too broadly, Hudson," Dickie said, shaking his head.

"We were discussing the line of development," Hudson reminded him.

"Even so," Dickie returned, "you've missed what seems to me an essential—I mean the special education of boys who have a particular bent. The old Oakstone was all right for you; it was all wrong for me. And why shouldn't I and my sort have the chance that Moseley's got to offer us?"

Hudson waived that aside. "You can't pick out a particular application like that and consider it apart from the development as a whole," he said. "Any small advantage

such as the one you instance can't be weighed in against the whole argument."

Dickie fumbled for an adequate reply and found none. He had realised that he would get nothing but dialectic from Hudson,—dialectic influenced by a point of view that, having once been stated, must and would be upheld by the logical and verbal ingenuities of which this youthful don was already a master.

"You're too good for me at debate, always were," Dickie said, rather ruefully. "I'll give in." He seached his mind for a subject of escape and some association prompted him to ask if Hudson knew what had become of Nigger Joyce, the doyen of the Remove.

Hudson's neat smile was faintly supercilious as he said, "Haven't you heard of Herbert Joyce, the new romantic novelist? He's to be a 'power in literature' *pace* the reviewers."

"Good Lord! Is that chap old Nigger?" exclaimed Dickie.

"Another Dumas, perhaps," Hudson suggested.

"And we used to think that he was practically an idiot," commented Dickie. "I wonder what Moseley would have made of him?"

"An engineer, probably," sneered Hudson.

IV

Dickie appropriated the seat of a defaulting Countess at lunch.

"I'm not Lady Cardwell," he explained, as he sat down next to A. B. Ellis. "She isn't here, I find, and I wanted to hear what you had to say about the new Oakstone."

"You remember it as it was?" Ellis asked with a keen, rather suspicious look, as if he feared a reporter.

"Rather," Dickie said. "I was here under Barnard."

"Quite a different place, then?"

"Just the old model, you know. Very compulsory Greek

and Latin, well rammed down with a wad to keep 'em tight."

"What did you do when you left?"

"Bank first, and then an office in the City."

"Didn't find your education much use, there, I suppose?"

"None whatever. But I want to know what you . . ."

Apparently Ellis, also, preferred to ask questions. "All in good time," he said. "We've a prolonged luncheon before us. What kind of office in the City did you go to from your Bank?"

But Dickie, if he were willing enough to mention his employer to such acquaintances as Dr. Olivier, reserved that information on general occasions. He had found that Lessing's name always provoked a particular heightening of interest in himself, interest of a kind that he had, in his own phrase, "no sort of use for."

"Financial agent," he said, shortly.

"Oh! all right," Ellis returned. "You sat down with the declared intention of pumping *me*."

"Not about your private affairs," Dickie submitted.

"I haven't any," Ellis said. "But I usually keep my opinions to myself until they're ready for copyrighting."

"I hadn't guessed that you were quite so professional," was Dickie's comment.

Ellis smiled and rubbed the back of his head with a suggestion of boyish glee.

"Look here, Barnard taught you something," he said. "Or was it your financial agent?"

"I *should* like to hear what you think of this method of Moseley's," retaliated Dickie.

"My dear chap," Ellis returned, putting a hand on Dickie's arm, "you'll find it all in my book, 'The Young Idea.' Really, you know, you mustn't expect an author to repeat himself. If you'll give me your name, I'll send you a copy of the book when I get back. I've nothing to add to it in connexion with to-day's ceremony, except the fact that I'm sending my eldest boy to Moseley next term." He

paused a moment and added thoughtfully, "It is, at least, a beginning."

"I certainly am rather an ass," admitted Dickie, as he took a card from his pocket book and scribbled the address of the Rectory under his name.

The visitors' lunch was being served in the boys' dining-room at the School House, and as Ellis took the card he glanced up at the school "boards" over the mantel-piece.

"I see Lynneker E. H. and Lynneker L. A., he commented.

"I don't appear on the Honours List," Dickie said. "The other two are my elder brothers."

"And they . . ." Ellis prompted him.

"Both in the church."

"You the only black sheep?"

Dickie's shrug of the shoulders might have been interpreted as disclaiming so much distinction.

"Nevertheless a little discoloured, theologically?" Ellis suggested.

For a time they talked discursively. Ellis was an imaginative thinker with a natural gift for phrase (a sufficient explanation of his success as a novelist), and he had a way of throwing the subjects he discussed into an illumination that seemed at the moment definite and final. Dickie, following a pace behind, was interested and impressed. He had not, hitherto, met any one so articulate and so prepared. And yet, even before the lunch was finished, he found himself being repelled as strongly as he was attracted.

Ellis had suddenly dropped his voice to the intimation of a near confidence.

"D'you know who that girl is?" he asked. "At the next table; in white; with an eloquent hat. She was on the platform at the prize-giving."

"I was told that she was a niece of the Bishop's wife," Dickie replied. He was conscious of a queer resentment as if he were again being impudently questioned about his private affairs.

Ellis was twirling the stem of a wine-glass. "Let me see, she'd be Philip Groome's daughter, then, wouldn't she?" he said. "There were only three Groomes in that generation; the present Lord Wansford, and Lady Constance and Philip; and Wansford, I know, hasn't any daughters."

"Very likely," Dickie said curtly. "A Medborough man who was sitting next to me just now told me that she was Lady Constance's niece. That's all I know."

Ellis glanced at the woman sitting at his left hand, and then leaned towards Dickie.

"Very attractive, that suggestion of ripe innocence; don't you think?" Ellis said. "That girl's quite unusually pretty, of course, but it's that look of poise, of hesitation on an edge, that's so fascinating. Much more attractive to me, for instance, than Gautier's Mlle. de Maupin with her rakish mind and innocent body. That girl's body, now, is in effect, mature with the natural instincts she has inherited from uncountable ancestors; while her mind is ready to receive the impression that any man cares to put upon it."

Dickie found that his face was burning with furious indignation. There had been something in Ellis's expression and tone that had discovered the naked lust of his thought. And to Dickie, it was as if all his own inhibited thoughts and desires had suddenly burst their long restraint. In the past five years he had mixed with men who habitually found their humour in the indecent, and when their jokes had had their origin in genuine wit, he had laughed with the crowd and without shamefacedness. He had recognised the part sexuality played in the life of men without criticism and without applying any test to his own feelings. In his waking hours he never dwelt on the dreams that emanated from the secret hiding places of his inhibited desires. He had always found an outlet in mental application, in all kinds of work and in his splendid capacities for physical exertion. In London his single panacea for what he called "stuffiness" had been the gymnasium.

But now, some black magic of Ellis's personality had

suddenly released all those suppressed images to dance about Dickie's brain, distorted and crippled by their long confinement. And all their obscene contortions were reflected, as it seemed to him, in the person of the brilliant novelist who had so unexpectedly called them forth. Dickie felt as if his most sacred thought had been brutally outraged.

"I loathe that kind of muck," he said, quite distinctly.

Ellis flushed slightly and then pursed his mouth into a whistle.

"Oh! shucks!" he remarked to the spaces across the table.

"I beg your pardon, I didn't quite catch . . ." said the bland voice of young Canon Lister, who was sitting immediately opposite; and who, now, leaned forward with an expression of the most intelligent interest.

"I used an American expression, sir," Ellis explained, "to convey a sense of ingenuous amazement. It is the kind of word one uses when one has been talking to some inferentially charming lady through a curtain, and she suddenly puts her face through and you find she's got a beard."

"Ah! indeed, yes," smiled Canon Lister, trying to look as if he perfectly appreciated the point. "Some of these American expressions are so forcible."

Dickie made a movement as if he would push the young Canon out of the conversation. "Look here," he said, turning half round in his chair so that he could face Ellis. "I apologise for that. You got me on the raw, in some way, and I didn't know till that moment that there was a raw there."

Ellis's face conveyed a whimsical amusement. "Most interesting," he remarked. "Sure you haven't met the lady before?"

Dickie scowled. "It wasn't that," he said. He felt impelled to deny that the thought of Miss Sibyl Groome had any connexion with the strange images which had leapt so amazingly from their confinement. "It was nothing what-

ever to do with—that,” he repeated. “It was your attitude towards what you were saying. It made me feel sick for a moment; and I’ve knocked about in the City and Paris and New York for five years and I’m not a bit squeamish, as a rule.”

“You’re not making it any better,” commented Ellis quietly.

“You think I’m a prig.”

“I was certainly surprised.”

“And offended, of course?”

“You were abominably plain spoken.”

The company at the table was rising, and there was a distracting clatter of voices and the noise of chairs grating on wooden boards.

“Well, send me that book, anyhow,” Dickie said. “You’ve interested me tremendously.”

“I’ll send it all right,” Ellis replied with a nod. “We must meet and have a talk when you come back to town—we’ll see if we can’t find a cure for that abnormality of yours.”

They were, indeed, destined to meet often in the future, but Dickie never found conviction that the abnormality was his. . . .

After Ellis had gone, Dickie looked round with a sudden sense that he had forgotten and missed something he had been waiting for.

The only persons left in the dining-room were Mr. and Mrs. Moseley and Evan Williams.

V

That conversation seriously interfered with Dickie’s enquiry into the educational method of Oakstone.

At first he resented the interruption and fought against it. He was not accustomed to the domination of an outside thought, and was very distinctly annoyed with himself when he found that his mind refused to entertain any

further interest in the subject he had come to investigate. By way of subduing this strange rebellion he deliberately imposed himself on Mr. Moseley when he got up to the cricket-field. Evan Williams had gone back to town immediately after the luncheon; but the head-master's attention was being claimed by an endless succession of cross-examining parents.

Dickie's manner of irruption amounted to rudeness and the anxious little Vicar of Pelsworthy who had Moseley's ear at the moment might have resented the intrusion if he had not inferred a little too respectfully that the intruder must be a celebrity. He was unfortunate enough, too, to miss the name, and spent the remainder of the afternoon fruitlessly enquiring of acquaintances and strangers, "Do you happen to know who the big young man in a dark grey flannel suit is? His face is quite familiar to me, but . . ."

"It's too bad to take up your time this afternoon, sir," Dickie said to Moseley, with an effect of issuing a royal command, "but I'm tremendously interested in your method. I was here under Barnard, you know."

Moseley,—he was a short, stoutish man,—laughed pleasantly. "If you can keep the parents off," he said, "I'll do what I can."

The Vicar of Pelsworthy excused himself at once, and went off to confirm his inference.

"Come over to the other side of the field," Moseley said to Dickie.

But the only impression left on Dickie by the conversation that followed was summed up in Ellis's remark, "It is, at least, a beginning." Something, certainly, was being done at Oakstone. The English public school tradition was being thrown overboard a little at a time, but the jettison had to be conducted warily.

"I can't afford, yet, to refuse boys," Moseley admitted. "In ten years' time, perhaps, I may."

And although the principle indicated by Mr. Bailey of educating a boy up to and by means of his natural bent

was clearly recognised, there was certainly room for a great advance in the method of ascertaining the evidences of any tendency that was not immediately manifest.

"I shall have over three hundred boys here, next term," Moseley remarked thoughtfully, "and it is impossible for me to watch them all individually."

"And your staff?" put in Dickie.

"Is nearly as difficult a problem as the parents," Moseley said; "and they are very difficult, indeed. They will plan their boys' futures from the moment the boy is born, and in many cases they are absolutely immovable. If George is meant for the church, we have to teach the duffer Latin and Greek, although he'll probably break away before he leaves the University and chuck all he's learnt—little enough, probably—to the winds. It's such a waste of time; ours as well as the boy's.

"And the staff? Yes, it's not easy to let them out of the public school and university tradition. I get young men, when I can, but most of 'em seem unable to regard school teaching as anything but mental discipline for the boys. The theory worked more or less in their own case, you see; and such a tiny percentage go in for school mastering because they want to teach. It's taken up *faute de mieux* by the majority."

"Have you read Ellis's book?" asked Dickie.

"'The Young Idea,' oh! yes. Splendid stuff in a way; but most of it unpractical from our point of view. It frames an ideal, but he's so impatient."

Dickie stood staring out across the burnt green of the sunny field, over the group of white figures that drew to a nucleus about the wickets, and towards the vivid garden of colour that clustered round the new pavilion. All the theory of education that an hour or two ago had appeared engaging and essential had become suddenly dull and fatiguing. Instead of figuring as a fascinating enterprise, it had taken on the air of all that dusty, necessary work at which he had so conscientiously laboured in the Medborough Bank or the dark offices in Austin Friars. He could understand

that this high employment, beginning to take shape here at Oakstone, was not work for him, but he could not understand why he had lost interest in an hour. Had Ellis poisoned his mind, or was he going to be ill? The latter seemed an absurd hypothesis. He had not been ill since he and Latimer had enjoyed the measles together, as little boys. He realised with a faint shock of astonishment that he had missed the purport of Moseley's last remark.

"I beg your pardon," Dickie apologised. "I was thinking of—of Ellis, I believe. He's a queer chap. I was talking to him at lunch. I've never met him before."

Moseley nodded. "I'm afraid I must be getting back, now," he said. "I hope you've got all the information you wanted. To-day I am, naturally, a trifle harassed."

"I shall be down at Halton for three months," Dickie returned. "I should like to come over and see you, sometime. I am, really, tremendously interested."

"Capital," Moseley said, genially. "I shall be delighted. I shall be here, alone, at the end of the holidays. I'll show you round the shops, if you can come then. Now! So sorry, but Lady Constance is going back by the 3.40; some function at the Palace, I believe. And I want to have a word with her about her boy. Good-bye."

He shook hands warmly with Dickie and trundled off to make the circuit of the field towards the pavilion.

Dickie reflected that he, also, might as well go by the 3.40. He would get all the information he wanted by visiting Oakstone in September. Until then he might put education out of his mind. There was nothing for him to do, here. And then he impatiently turned away from the pavilion and the gate into the road that led to the station, and made his way to the shadow of the elms in the far corner of the field. He had the shade all to himself. The little white figures about the wickets were almost hidden by the fall of the ground.

He was remembering how in the old days, when he was in Wickford's form, he had diligently swatted up his Cæsar, finely resolute to keep his mind away from any

contemplation of tempting problems in algebra. Was he more capable of concentration in those days, he wondered; or why was it,—unless he were incredibly going to be ill,—that he felt unable, now, to fix his attention upon Oakstone and its method, and keep out the intruding figure of Ellis? Even there, alone in the shadow of the elms, Dickie insisted upon describing the invader as “Ellis.”

One thing, at least, he could do. He could stay under the elms until it was too late to catch the 3.40.

VI

He was home just in time for the half-past seven supper. He could congratulate himself, then, on the re-attainment of his normal sanity. He had met another old boy who had been in the first eleven the year Dickie got his colours, and the two of them had borrowed a bat, a ball, and half-a-dozen willing small boys, and had gone to the deserted upper field and had an hour's practice at the net. The eager, hot little out-fielders had been delighted by the power of Dickie's drives.

“Why weren't you playing for the old boys, sir?” they asked him.

Now, that he was home again, except for a slight feeling of flatness, Dickie found himself entirely recovered from the strange interference with his mental balance that had so suddenly upset him at the luncheon table. All those distorted images had been safely shut back into their old quarters. He knew quite well, now, what was the matter with him. He had been idle for three whole days, slacking about and getting soft. If he were to stay at Halton for three months,—and his father's condition had finally clinched that resolve,—he must take up some definite work. He might learn Russian, and read up his mathematics in relation to astronomical calculations. He had, that summer, met a man named Levinson, who was an assistant at the Royal Observatory, and had been down to Greenwich on

three or four occasions. He decided to write to Levinson and ask his advice. . . .

The other three were already seated when he came into the dining-room.

"There's a note for you, dear, from the Palace!" his mother said, almost before he had sat down. "It came at five o'clock by the second post."

The "second post" was a new addition to the Halton service, and Mrs. Lynneker still spoke of it with a touch of pride.

Dickie frowned and pushed the note aside. "Oh! yes, I met Dr. Olivier in the train coming down," he said. "I expect it's an invitation to lunch."

"Aren't you going to open it?" his mother asked in amazement, and the Rector looked up, with puzzled scrutiny from his tentative sipping of the thin "Revelenta." (Emma had gone to the other extreme this evening.) Dickie was more than ever now a source of wonder and doubt to his father and mother. Neither Latimer nor Edward had ever received such an invitation; and it was twenty years since the Rector and his wife had last been honoured by this peculiar mark of episcopal favour.

"Dick takes it all for granted," his father said with a rather grim smile that did not conceal the pride he felt in his boy's capabilities.

"Oh! it wasn't that, pater," Dickie said. "Only I'm not sure . . ." he hesitated before he concluded lamely, "if I'm particularly keen on going."

His mother could understand that. She was unable to conceive the fact that her son would not be horribly shy on such an occasion.

"Well, it may be to say that the Bishop is too busy, or something," she encouraged him, and experienced a feeling of vicarious relief.

Dickie tore open the letter with the prong of a fork. The note was written on a masculine paper, but the handwriting of all but the signature was certainly feminine and pervaded by the faintest odour of scent.

"Dear Mr. Lynneker," the invitation ran, "will you forgive a very busy man for such short notice and come to lunch here at one-thirty, to-morrow (Friday)? If you cannot manage it, it will be my own fault. Please do not trouble to answer this, but just come if you are able to."

No doubt, the letter had been dictated at the same time as many others, and the Bishop had begun to sign his name as "Medborough" (there was no Latin for it) and had then crossed out the "M" and subscribed himself "sincerely yours, A. Olivier."

"I suppose he keeps a woman secretary?" remarked Dickie with apparent irrelevancy.

"No, Mr. Johns is the Bishop's secretary," Eleanor said, "but he's away on his holiday, I think."

She held out her hand for the letter and then scrutinised it intently. "It isn't Lady Constance's writing," she affirmed. "She writes rather a big hand."

"Shall you go, dear?" Mrs. Lynneker put in anxiously, bored by these futile speculations.

"I suppose so," Dickie said carelessly. "Lady Constance was on the platform to-day. Bailey,—the ironmonger, you know,—was sitting next to me, and pointed her out. He said her brother, Philip Groome, was staying at the Palace."

"He's an invalid, I believe," put in the Rector.

"So Bailey said," Dickie agreed. "That gawky son of his got a prize for mechanics. One would never have thought . . ."

"What shall you wear, dear?" his mother interrupted him.

"My stock tweed, I suppose," Dickie said. He leaned forward and picked up the Bishop's note from the table, hesitated as if he intended to tear it across, and then crammed it into his jacket pocket.

"I've made up my mind to learn Russian, while I'm at home," he said.

CHAPTER XV

SIBYL

I

DICKIE arrived at the Palace twenty minutes too soon. He had come in to Medborough by train, and then had forgotten that he would be too early until he had actually rung at the Bishop's front door.

Sibyl Groome was alone in the drawing-room when he was announced. She looked up at him with a vague hostility as if she resented his intrusion.

"Lady Constance will be down directly," she said and glanced at the French clock perched up over the Gothic fire-place.

"I'm afraid I'm rather early," Dickie said, returning her look of hostility.

"Won't you sit down?" was all her comment on his apology. She had not risen when he came in, and when he sat down without further remark, she returned to the book she had been reading and was still marking with an intent finger.

Dickie lounged in his chair by the window and made no attempt to open a conversation. The drawing-room was on the first floor and he looked out at the wet green of the Palace lawn, smooth and clean as the cloth of a billiard table.

All about him, here, were the marks of age and tradition. The two five-light, mullioned windows with the lozenges of their perpendicular tracery filled in with coats of arms in stained glass; the black oak panelling that completely encased the long narrowness of the low room; the

ecclesiastical richness of the Gothic fire-place, over which the ornate French clock sat with a ridiculous air of feminine frills and lace, the dark hollows of the coffered ceiling, were none of them less than three hundred and fifty years old, contemporary, probably, with the laying of that delicate lawn.

But, here, he felt no appeal against the insurgence of the twentieth century. This room was adapting itself, apparently without effort, to the invasions of modernity. And it seemed probable that Lady Constance or her husband had had no hesitation in jumbling what had been, probably, the furniture of their Kensington house into this sixteenth century place.

Dickie's attention, wandering from point to point as he made his inventory, was gradually drawn to the centre of the room, to the incongruously comfortable arm chair in which Sibyl Groome was, or had been, reading. She still held her book, but she was now frankly staring at her visitor.

Dickie's eyes met hers with the leap of an anticipated decision. It was as if two adversaries after strategic circlings and feints of evasion had suddenly clinched.

"Are you criticising the furniture?" she asked.

Dickie was aware of a strong desire to demonstrate his complete independence of Miss Groome's opinions or personality; and he did not smile as he said,

"'Criticising' is hardly the word, I think. In fact, I was wondering why modern furniture didn't seem out of place, here."

"I think it does," Miss Groome returned with a gentle vehemence. "Utterly out of place. It's only temporary, of course, the furniture, I mean. This room, particularly, is going to be furnished in keeping with the style."

"It'll be jolly uncomfortable, you know," Dickie commented.

"I don't see why," Miss Groome said on a cold note of challenge.

"No padding or anything of that kind," Dickie sug-

gested. "They didn't go in for comfort in the sixteenth century."

"Of course, if you are one of those people who would sacrifice everything for comfort . . ." she said.

"But what *do* you sacrifice, actually?" he asked.

"Oh! well—Art." She brought out her remonstrance with the air of one committing herself irrevocably to a new faith.

"It isn't art to copy old models," he returned quietly.

Miss Groome seemed to brace herself. She sat up stiffly, dropped her book, and clasped her hands together with an effect of preparing to be very indignant. And indeed, her dark eyes looked very hostile as she said,

"It would be better art than this, anyhow. You must admit that."

"I don't," Dickie returned, with an annoyingly confident air of knowing exactly what he wanted to say. "This room, as it is, expresses something of the personality of—it's Lady Constance, I suppose; or, at least, of the present day. Any one could furnish this place from old models. You'd only have to give an order to any dealer. Just say 'middle sixteenth century, with no hint of renaissance anywhere,' and the thing's done. It would be like sending your maid to match a piece of old material, that's all. There's no originality in it; no personal feeling. Everybody can do that. It's merely a question of how much money you're prepared to spend."

Miss Groome shrugged her shoulders. "Of course, if you did it *that* way," she said contemptuously. "Aunt Connie means to do it a little at a time. Pick up things in cottages and that sort of thing."

"Even then, she'd only be doing it on a theory, following a canon," Dickie submitted. "She wouldn't be expressing her own taste."

"I don't see how you can possibly know that," Miss Groome began warmly; and then Lady Constance came in, tall and graceful, and yet with an air of drooping with a faint deference to any opinion.

"Am I—late?" she said, as Dickie stood up and bowed. She glanced at the coquettish clock as if she doubted the dependability of a thing so feminine and deceitful.

"No, I was too early," Dickie explained. "I came in by train and forgot."

Lady Constance smiled. "One does," she said, as if she found this explanation pleasantly satisfying. "I continually forget. I must admit that only yesterday . . ." She leaned a little forward, comfortably launched upon an anecdote that would fill the expectant interval without the necessity for asking banal questions. Her niece interrupted her.

"He . . . Mr. . . . I don't know his name," she began impetuously.

Lady Constance was hopefully inspired to say "Lynneker" and looked to Dickie for approval.

"Mr. Lynneker has been saying that it would be bad art to furnish this room in its proper period," Miss Groome went on indignantly. "He seems to be one of those people who imagine that any sort of originality is better than having beautiful things."

"Do you?" commented Lady Constance, and smiled again at Dickie as if she would tenderly encourage any opinion he cared to offer.

"No, I said that this room did in some way represent you, that was all," Dickie explained. "And that I preferred that it should do that, rather than be a sort of show example in the business of collecting congruous pieces of old furniture."

"Does it represent me, do you think?" Lady Constance asked. "But how could you know that? You hadn't ever seen me, had you?"

"I saw you yesterday on the platform at Oakstone," Dickie said, "but I expect I meant that the room did represent something more or less individual, you know; not just a concession to some particular dogma."

But already he could see that he had been wiser than he knew. The eclectic furnishings of that mediæval apartment

held something of their owner's tender femininity. Like her, they were gentle, soft, conceding. Even that gesticulating, coquettish clock was nothing more than a concession to feminine needs. The room wore that clock as Lady Constance might have worn an osprey's feather in her hat.

"Oh! were you at Oakstone, yesterday?" Lady Constance said. "I don't remember seeing you. I think Mr. Moseley is such a dear, comfortable person, and so tremendously right about education. My eldest boy is in the upper fourth, and the two others will go there as soon as they are old enough."

Miss Groome, however, was not to be diverted from her purpose of finally crushing Dickie.

"Oh! never mind Oakstone, Connie, dear," she said impatiently. "Do say Mr. Lynneker is absolutely wrong about not having this room refurnished. You know you're quite determined to do it properly as soon as you've got time to go about and pick up things."

"Mediæval furniture would be very uncomfortable to live with," Dickie put in, disregarding the look of annoyance that Miss Groome shot at him.

"So hard, yes," agreed Lady Constance. "You remember, Sibyl, that I've always thought it might be rather hard."

"We'll ask uncle Clement," Miss Groome decided.

II

Indeed, she resolutely carried her campaign down to the dining-room, where they found Philip Groome already seated. In the short interval during which the Bishop had joined in the discussion upstairs, he had evidenced a *laissez-faire* attitude that his niece had found, as she had distinctly stated, perfectly disgusting.

She appealed to her father for support directly she saw him, misstating her case against Dickie with the same

reckless ingenuity she had shown at each inclusion of a new party to the discussion.

Groome looked at his daughter with quiet admiration that held some touch of cynical approval, and then turned the stare of his dark, rather feminine eyes upon the object of his daughter's attack.

"If you have to be a victim to some obsession," he remarked, "it's far safer to stick to the antique. The victim of originality is the worst kind of bore."

Dickie nodded with a casual air of not being greatly interested. Miss Groome's persistence was beginning to annoy him. "Any kind of bore is the worst kind at the moment," he said.

Groome appeared to relish that. "Oh! if it's only a game," he said, "I'm willing to take a hand. Which is the weakest side?"

"Mine," Sibyl replied. "I'm one against three. Aunt Connie has deserted and uncle is just playing for safety."

"Keeps him in practice for diocesan purposes," commented Groome.

The Bishop's amused smile showed that he was accustomed to the acidity of his brother-in-law's wit.

"Better than being too original, Phil," he put in.

But Sibyl hauled back the slipping conversation before it was beyond reach.

"Do try to give me a sensible opinion, dear," she said to her father. "Really, I want to know what you do truly think. Do you prefer the drawing-room to be just littered about with any old scraps of furniture as it is, now; or would you prefer to see it done in one style to match the panelling and the windows and all that?"

"Honestly, I don't care, my dear Sibyl," was Groome's answer. "And I don't believe *you* do. But I *should* like to know what our friend here has done to put your back up."

"What *has* that to do with it?" Sibyl asked. "Mr. Lynneker hasn't put my back up in the very least. Of course, if you don't *care*, you're out of it altogether. It's just a

question of whether one does care for beautiful things or not."

"No; it's a question of what one thinks *is* beautiful," Dickie put in.

"Well, surely, there can't be any doubt which is more beautiful in this case?" Sibyl retorted.

"The alternatives being, as I understand them," Olivier said, "your aunt's character and sixteenth century benches."

"Oh! here," Groome interposed. "Where does Connie come in? This is one of those new puzzles. Is it more beautiful to die smiling, or the Dome of St. Paul's?"

Lady Constance graciously explained her own inclusion in the contrast. "Mr. Lynneker was nice enough to say that the drawing-room . . . 'expressed' me, was his word, I think," she added.

And then the Bishop, with a thought, perhaps, of a possible report of this conversation at Halton, so far satisfied his niece as to attempt a serious criticism of modern art in furniture, with references to the Gothic in architecture, which he praised with obviously sincere feeling.

"You did deserve your bishopric, Clem," Groome remarked when his brother-in-law had finished. "I believe you could straddle all the stools in the world without falling."

"The thing is to be sure your stools are reliable stools," Olivier retorted.

After that the conversation wavered indecisively about art in furniture until lunch was nearly finished. Unhappily, from Sibyl's point of view, no one had succeeded in finally crushing Dickie. Nor had she found quite the opportunity she was seeking to retaliate for that suggestion of his; the "unforgivably rude"—she found other and more pungent descriptions of himself—implication that her persistence was nothing but a bore.

Dickie, in the intervals of his attention to the Oliviers and Philip Groome, found time to congratulate himself on the fact that a nearer view of Lady Constance's niece had not revived the disturbing emotions which some unexplored

and hitherto almost unrecognised part of himself had so alarmingly presented at Oakstone. He found a solace, now, in assuring himself that Sibyl Groome was quite an ordinary person. If she had preserved for him that oddly attractive air of remote familiarity which had intrigued him when he first saw her, he might not have committed himself with such reckless confidence to the possibility of her nearer acquaintance.

III

It was the Bishop who, obviously tired of a conversation that had ceased to have any point or interest, turned to Dickie and resolutely opened a new subject.

"By the way, Lynneker," he said, "I suppose you don't know of any decent houses to be let furnished anywhere about here? My brother-in-law finds that this place suits him, and he wants to try it for six months or so."

Dickie considered a moment and decided that he was perfectly safe before he said, "There is a house in Halton. It isn't very large, three sitting-rooms and six or seven bedrooms, I think. It belongs to the chap who is technically our squire, but he hasn't lived in it for years. I know he lets it sometimes. Folliett acts for him, I believe."

"We might go and look at it, Phil?" suggested the Bishop, looking solicitously at his brother-in-law. "Halton's only five miles."

Groome waved his delicate, rather shrunken hand. "Let Connie and Sibyl go," he said. "Women do understand a little about houses."

"I suppose there's a garden," he added, turning to Dickie.

"Oh! the garden is really decent," Dickie said. "Acres of it. It's probably been let down a bit, and about half of it has always been quite wild, almost a park, you know; but the M. F. H. had it until last spring" (Eleanor's letters never contained anything but local news of this type), "so I daresay he kept it going."

The Bishop recalled a memory of a tedious length of high wall on the outskirts of Halton village.

"That's the place," Dickie corroborated. "It's known as Halton House."

Lady Constance thought that she and Sibyl might drive over the next morning. "Perhaps you could meet us there," she said, looking at Dickie as if she were graciously imploring his help in some great undertaking.

"Oh! yes, rather," Dickie said, helpfully, and suddenly discovered that for no particular reason he was looking at Sibyl Groome.

"You needn't be afraid that I shall start the furniture argument again," she said with a little girlish air of hauteur. "That's quite finished, and I am *quite* unconvinced."

Dickie reflected that she was, after all, only a child; and that she had probably been denied all the usual chances of her position by being kept in attendance on an invalid father. He wondered if he had not been foolishly prejudiced in his thought of her. She was so manifestly harmless; just a lovely, harmless thing, that had tried to push him away with soft, feeble hands.

"Really I know that you were perfectly right," he admitted. "But it was a topic, and there is something to be said on the other side."

"You mean that you weren't sincere?" she asked on a note of disgust.

"Were you?" he said.

She blushed vividly. "Yes," she retorted, with a stare that defied him to challenge her statement.

Olivier was whimsically stroking his chin. "We won't, I think, start that subject again," he said. "Nevertheless, I seem to remember, now, that a day or two ago you were imploring your aunt to leave that room as it is."

"I hadn't properly thought about it, then, uncle," Sibyl returned. "Or I may have said so to please aunt Connie; I knew she would hate the bother of doing it properly. But I'm perfectly sincere about the principle."

"Hang your infernal principles, Sibyl," her father put

in peevishly. "Will you have a look at this place for me to-morrow?"

"Well, of course, dear," she said gently. "We've settled that."

IV

A man-servant came with a wheeled chair to fetch Philip Groome when lunch was finished.

"Are you going upstairs, Phil?" Olivier asked. "I'll join you in half-an-hour. Lynneker, I hope, is coming to my study for a little talk. After that . . ."

"Really, a Bishop has not much leisure, Lynneker," he said when he and Dickie were alone; "and just now my secretary is away. Sibyl has been writing letters for me. Well, I want to continue the conversation we began in the train. Do you smoke? No? I admit a weakness for the humble pipe, only permissible in these solitudes, of course. Now, would you think me impertinent if I asked you what you intend to do with your life?"

Dickie was prepared to be perfectly frank. He appreciated Olivier's charm and the manifest sincerity that underlay his determination to steer a safe course through the shoals of theological and political dissensions and intrigue. They came back to that inevitably from their discussion of Dickie's future; the question of what the Bishop called "common prudence," underlay the whole problem they were considering.

"You rather imply a criticism of me as an opportunist," Olivier said with his genial, intimate smile, in answer to an objection of Dickie's; "and of course, if I pleaded that the end justified a little laxity in method, you would denounce me as jesuitical."

Dickie shook his head impatiently. "No, no, I shouldn't," he returned, "I hate those beastly labels. People seem to think that if they can find an epithet that will stick, the thing they've labelled is fixed and done with. Obviously it

isn't. It is only defined from a certain point of view, and generally the epithet describes the mind of the labeller better than the thing he's labelled. But I do feel that this question of a method must be a personal problem. If you feel convinced that you are right in hinting your approval of eternal damnation to my father in order to keep your diocese in hand, then I think you're justified. I couldn't do it. Not for any ethical reason, I think; but because it bothers me. Of course, I do equivocate; I must, in ordinary life, but I couldn't make a profession of it, as I should have to do if I went into politics."

Olivier winced a little. "I suppose if one had the courage and self-reliance," he began, and then abruptly drew down the curtain of his ordinary manner. Martyrdom was not his line, and if there had been moments in his life when he had faced the thought of the harder way to salvation, he had satisfied himself that his gifts had fitted him for another purpose.

"I'm sorry, Lynneker," he said, "but I'm afraid our half hour has already grown into three-quarters. I shall only just have time to take you up to the other room. But we must meet again. You have interested me. If only you could have reconciled your beliefs and come into the church . . ."

"I might have become a bishop?" concluded Dickie.

Olivier laughed genially. "Nothing short of Pope would satisfy you," he said, but his manner became more formal as he went on. "Ah! and by the way, Lynneker, I should really be grateful if you would look over that house at Halton with a more practical eye than perhaps my wife and Sibyl will bring to it. The question of dampness and drains, for example. My brother-in-law can't stand damp. . . ."

V

They discussed Dickie at the Palace that evening.

"He has that thing they call 'personality,'" the Bishop said, "and an uncommonly able mind, too, I should say."

"He looks so strong," put in Lady Constance. "I'm sure I should trust him anywhere."

"But isn't he rather a prig, don't you think?" asked Sibyl.

Her aunt thought not; but the Bishop hesitated, clutching at an explanation of his own success. "Hm! I wonder," he said.

And then Philip Groome's soft, cynical voice came out of the gloom of the corner where he sat in his invalid chair.

"It's so consoling to label any man 'a prig' who has the courage of his convictions," he said. "Hasn't it ever struck you, Clem, that Christ was a prig?"

"My dear Phil, you go too far," expostulated Olivier.

"It's a vice, I admit," Groome said. "Even such small honesties as I am liable to, now and again, spoil the delights of living. Let's be jolly and not too inquisitive."

Olivier fidgeted uneasily. Two attacks in one day were enough to vex the most convinced mind. What was it that boy had intended when he had upheld so gravely that to enter the church in order to win a bishopric was an ambition that made no appeal to him? Now he thought of it, Olivier decided that his visitor had overstepped the limits of polite comment. He looked over to the dark corner where his brother-in-law sat, and saw his pale, thin face with its long, straight nose and dark beard, shining against the shadowed panelling outside the little bright circle of the shaded lamps. And it seemed to the Bishop that the face was like the face of a reproachful Christ.

"Really, do you know, I think this house at Halton promises rather well, Phil," he said cheerfully.

Philip Groome leaned back into his former obscurity and the exorcised vision vanished. "I shall be uncommonly glad if it will do," he said. "I like this place, and I'm interested in our candid young friend, Lynneker. He has courage."

"Utterly unlike either of his brothers," commented Olivier. Already his mind was at peace again. For him, con-

stituted as he was, with all his versatile abilities, a bishopric opened the widest field of work; and he had never been a shirker.

VI

Dickie walked home from Medborough. He had found that his thought ran more fluently if less consecutively when he was physically active, and just now he was investigating a problem which he knew was more likely to find solution by some sudden inspiration than by any logical process. Nevertheless he cleared the ground of his approach by recalling his old premisses and deductions.

He knew quite definitely that what he sought was not an absolute, but a personal, rule of life. Even then he recognised that his own work in the world would have no far-reaching influence. He had none of the characteristics of the reformer; no ambition to separate himself from the immediacies of life, in order to regard them with critical detachment.

His recent conversation had confirmed him in that attitude. He had caught a glimpse of some old yearning that had once divided Olivier's mind, and that had been successfully swamped by his preferment—probably by that earlier appointment to the vicarage of the Kensington church. Dickie's training in the world's Exchanges had taught him to watch men's faces for subtle indications of emotion or purpose; and in that, as in so many other employments, he had exhibited what was, in effect, the qualifying patience that must keep pace with the natural aptitude of the perfect workman. (When he sought any definition of his own capacities, he found more satisfaction in the name of an efficient workman than in any other.)

And realising the alternative, he still did not blame Olivier for following the easier road to power. For Dickie had begun to guess that many a man who is constrained by some vision to seek martyrdom, is unfitted spiritually

or mentally to fulfil the high ambition; and that such a man's failure may be anything but splendid. And Olivier, he thought, had probably found a more useful outlet, so far as the world was concerned, by accepting high ecclesiastical office than by offering himself as, say, a missionary. Indeed, he might have gained in his own character. There is a discipline too hard for some men, a discipline that breaks and weakens all but the fiercest spirits. Olivier had probably been justified in his choice. He, possibly, had a weakness that might have betrayed him under too great a strain.

But Dickie, himself, had never been tempted by any such vision of an absolute. Only he had rejected those paths to influence which seemed to him unworthy. And if he had, at last, accepted Lessing's offer rather as a means to general knowledge than because he approved the methods of the money market, he still believed that he had come nearer to life through finance than he could ever have come through politics.

Nevertheless, he knew that now as never before, some instinct was turning his face away from Austin Friars. . . .

He stopped when he came to the private gate through the Grinling woods, and remembered how he had once received there the confession of his brother's love for Helen Leake. And then with a little shock of surprise it occurred to him that he had passed by the gate of Thrapley Rectory without a single thought of Edward or his wife.

"I wonder if I am less wide awake than I used to be?" he thought. The Lynnekers, as a family, had a trick of annoying lapses into small fits of abstraction. They were, perhaps, a trifle inclined to encourage those lapses as suggestive of a preoccupation with higher matters than those that might be under discussion. Dickie's habit of mind had always been toward concentration, but he had the gift of being able to think competently without losing his awareness of present circumstances.

He frowned and shook his head impatiently. He had a

sense of being interfered with and constrained. He felt like Gulliver, confined by a multitude of Lilliputian threads. He wanted to rise up in his strength, and could find no purchase to aid him towards re-establishment on the clear ground of independence.

Had Ellis bewitched him yesterday?

At lunch, as he had sat in the stone-panelled refectory that was now the Palace dining-room, odd thoughts and interruptions had interfered between him and the conversation about the luncheon table. In the Bishop's study it had required a conscious effort to keep his mind upon a subject that should have been of more than ordinary interest to him. And now, in the cool retreat of this tall wood, apart from the distractions of humanity, he was still unable to control his mind. He was conscious of a hurrying impatience, and of some attraction in the sound of the phrase "to-morrow," that was new to him. He had always been able to find employment in the day.

"I must face this," he said to himself. And as if he would find some stimulus in the fact of placing himself in a position that demanded some relaxation of carelessness, he climbed the locked gate and entered the private grounds of the absent-minded Thrapley squire, whose estates stretched to the common that was the last boundary of Halton parish. By crossing that corner of the park, he could cut off the long detour necessitated by the looping road, but he would trespass over the most sacred part of the pheasant preserves. He saw his adventure as a boy's game. He had no fear of any unpleasant consequences, but he postulated an imaginary necessity to avoid the eye of a keeper.

He left the grass road a few yards from the gate and set out to make a short cut through the very heart of the wood.

And he forgot his game before he had gone two hundred yards. He had determined to face his problem and suddenly the problem rose up clear and visible and confronted *him*. In some unprecedented way the girl Sibyl Groome had come between him and his sight of life.

He had only seen her three times and she had come before him each time in a different guise.

On the Oakstone platform, she had come with a suggestion of some age-long familiarity, and yet as something immensely remote and unattainable. The speech-day dais had lifted her above any possibility of equal intercourse, and it had seemed to him that the dais had supported her alone. Seen in retrospect, the common movement of all the other figures had had no convincing air of reality. The traffic of an ordinary speech-day was something that left no distinctive trace of its passing.

But at the luncheon table in the School House dining-room, Ellis—quite definitely, Ellis had been responsible for some effect of the change—had put her on a level with all women as something to be regarded not only as approachable but even easy of conquest. She was still remote from Dickie, separated from him by the fact that she advertised wares which he had spent ten years in avoiding. His passion at the suggestion of some possible intimacy between him and her had been evoked by the destruction of his former image rather than by any fear of entanglement. But in that moment he and she had been face to face upon level ground.

And, now, to-day, he had seen her as a human being apart from any thought of her sex. He had seen her as a young girl who for some reason that he could not guess had met him with a veiled hostility, had patently resented his opinion with regard to the futile furnishings of Lady Constance's drawing-room; and had sought, with what appeared an inexplicable bitterness, to find some means of snubbing him. He saw her attempts as a little foolish, as the weak reprisal of an affronted child, seeking impossibly to revenge the smart of a new bruise. But then, for the first time, her personality had interested him. . . .

He had found again his power of consecutive thought. There was no longer any interference because he had turned all his mind to the thing that had been demanding and had been refused his attention. Nevertheless, he was horribly

perplexed. He no longer denied entrance to this disturbing phenomenon, but he did not pretend to understand it.

He had forgotten his intention to make the secret passage of Sir Frederic Hope's preserves, and came out suddenly into open ground, facing a range of pheasant pens and wooden sheds. As he emerged from the shelter of the wood, a man in leather gaiters came out of one of the sheds, and looked across at Dickie with an air of quick, furtive suspicion.

"Hi! You! Where yer going?" the man shouted after a moment of alert suspense.

VII

Dickie walked deliberately across the open space to meet him.

"Here, you're trespassing, you know," the keeper said, but he did not move from the door of the shed as Dickie approached.

Dickie nodded carelessly. "I've no doubt Sir Frederic will overlook it this time," he replied.

"Of course, sir, if you're a friend of Sir Frederic's," the keeper began, and the signs of impatient anger he had shown were again crossed by a look of slightly shame-faced suspicion.

"I'm not," Dickie said. "My name is Lynneker. I'm going to Halton."

The keeper scowled, but still stood squarely across the entrance to the shed, the door of which opened outwards and was flung back against the shingled wall. "Well, you've no right here. You know that well enough," he said. "Best thing you can do is to be off, double quick."

"Can I get out through the spinney on that side?" asked Dickie, pointing in the direction of Halton. He gave no sign of being offended by the man's rudeness.

"No, you can't," the keeper returned, and then added quickly, "anyway, you've no rights to."

"That's my nearest way, I suppose," Dickie remarked casually.

The keeper made a movement that seemed to express an anxiety to be rid of the trespasser at any cost.

"I suppose you don't want to get me into trouble, sir," he said with more respect. "Sir Frederic's very particular. You've got to trespass, now, whichever way you go, anyhow; and that's the shortest way out."

Dickie turned as if to continue his short cut, and then paused and said, "Oughtn't you to see me off the estate?"

The keeper was obviously embarrassed. "Afraid to go alone?" he muttered.

"Do I go straight through there?" Dickie asked, pointing to a gap in the wood towards Halton.

"There's a path and a ladder stile," the keeper said, sulkily. "You can't miss 'em." He stood for a moment, watching his undesired visitor make his way towards the gap, but when Dickie looked back from the edge of the spinney, the keeper was no longer to be seen and the door of the shed was pulled to.

Dickie threw up his head, sighed and dug his hands into his jacket pockets. He knew the cause of the keeper's embarrassment, the reason for his anxiety to be rid of the trespasser with the least possible bother and delay. The skirts of the woman who was hiding in the gloom of the little shed had been quite visible over the keeper's shoulder. . . .

It was the thought of all this furtive slinking and greedy animalism that puzzled and offended Dickie. He knew the marks of it well enough. He had seen them in City bars, had heard men talking without reserve and watched the lust swim into their stealthy eyes. That keeper had been shivering with anxiety to be rid of the intruder, at once ashamed and angry. He had been like a dog, become hesitatingly vicious in his desire to enjoy some fragment of stolen meat. He had looked much as Ellis had looked, for one quick instant, in the Oakstone dining-room. . . .

Dickie was willing to admit that he did not understand

this thing; even to admit that it was, perhaps, the one important thing in life that he had never attempted to understand. But he did not know that this failure of his was beginning to influence his mind and body. In one sense his failure had been accidental. Like many boys he had been ashamed of the first indications of puberty. He had been taught indirectly and by the vaguest hints and prohibitions that the traffic of sex was a shameful thing. But whereas in the overwhelming majority of such cases a boy's very weakness may prove to be his safeguard, Dickie had been, in effect, too strong. Only on the rarest occasions, such as that night when he dragged Martyn down to the river for a midnight bathe, had he permitted any sort of desire to come to the surface of his imaginings; and never at any time but in the open air. Always, the confinement of a house had had the effect of presenting love in the shape of something to be despised and desperately fought against, something secret and unclean.

Why, he asked himself as he came out to the edge of the common and saw the spire of Halton pricking up behind the Rectory elms, why could not a man love a woman as a friend? Already he had come as far as that. He was, as ever, honest with himself, and he knew, now, and faced the fact, that some quality in the personality of Sibyl Groome had attracted him in a way that had no precedent in his experience. He wanted to understand why she had been so hostile to him that afternoon; to understand her combination of childishness and wonderful experience. Her very simplicity had been full of mystery, the simplicity of a child, condescending to the interruptions of an adult separated by an impassable bar of knowledge from any intuition of the overpowering realities of immediate life. Dickie was sure that in her heart she had despised him because he could not understand. And behind these superficial manifestations of her personality was something exquisitely remote and unattainable. On the Oakstone platform she had seemed to embody a symbol of the eternal spirit, focussed for a moment in an aspect

of beauty. He had seen her as goddess, woman and child; but in each presentation she had been beyond his attainment and comprehension.

Before he reached home he had decided that if the Groomes took Halton House, he would do his utmost to penetrate that reserve of hers. The adventure might help him to find some more attractive suggestion in the allurements of sex, than that discovered by the greedy eyes of Ellis, of the men in City bars, or of the impatient keeper.

Dickie had no more thought for his own safety than any other explorer whose chance of achievement must come by way of personal risk.

VIII

He had left the Palace at half-past three, and it was past five when he entered the Rectory garden. His father, mother and Eleanor were having tea, or sitting over the tea-table, under the sycamore on the front lawn.

His mother waved to him excitedly as he came up the path from the side gate. "We thought you'd be sure to come by the 3.35," she said, as soon as he was within hearing.

"I walked back," Dickie explained.

"I'll get you some fresh tea," Eleanor said.

"No, don't bother. If there's any milk, that'll do," Dickie returned. "I took it very easily."

His mother began an automatic, solicitous insistence, but his smile stopped her. She found it so difficult to realise that he meant what he said, and that if he had wanted tea, he would have fetched it for himself.

"Well, how did it go off?" she asked.

"I was a bit early," Dickie said. "We discussed the æsthetics of furniture, chiefly, during lunch; and then I had three-quarters of an hour with the Bishop in his study."

The Rector leaning forward in his chair with his thin

hands clasped over the handle of the stick that he found necessary now, even to walk the few yards from the front door to the sycamore on the lawn, was watching his boy with the old admiration that had welled up in him when that fierce round of applause broke out in the old schoolroom at Oakstone.

"What did you talk about to Olivier, Dick?" he asked.

"Well, we were a trifle ethical," Dickie said. "He seemed interested in the choice of a profession for me, and we discussed honesty of purpose, inside the church and out of it."

"Did he think you ought to leave the City?" put in Mrs. Lynneker, with a hint of anxiety. If the Bishop had advised that step, she believed that it would be her duty to confirm so high an authority.

"Oh! he didn't offer me any advice, you know," Dickie returned, and his voice and expression suggested that he would not have been prepared to accept advice if it had been offered. "He did say just as I was going that it was a pity I hadn't gone into the church."

"Ah!" commented the Rector, with considerable feeling, and Mrs. Lynneker sighed thoughtfully.

"What did you *say*?" Eleanor asked.

"Well, I rather hinted that even a bishopric didn't appeal to me much."

"Wasn't that rather rude?" Eleanor's question had the flavour of a rebuke.

"Yes, I suppose it was," Dickie admitted. "He didn't seem to mind. He said he supposed nothing short of the papacy would satisfy me."

The Rector nodded his head with a grim smile. "You're not thinking of going over, Dick," he remarked.

Eleanor set her mouth into a thin line. She was sternly suppressing her desire to unmask her brother's infidelity. Neither of her parents seemed able to realise that he was actually an atheist. "He's a humbug," she said to herself. She was torn between the longing to speak out her contempt

for his hypocrisy, and her wish to protect her father and keep his regard.

"Becoming a Roman Catholic?" Dickie said. "Rather not. Too much respect for my own freedom of thought."

"Hear, hear," the Rector murmured.

Eleanor wondered how he could be so blind.

"By the way, it's just possible that the Groomes may take Halton House," Dickie said to create a diversion.

He was aware of his sister's frowning disapproval, and had no wish to provoke her anger. "Lady Constance and Miss Groome are coming over to look at it to-morrow," he went on. "I promised the Bishop I would meet them there, and find out if the place was damp."

"That's Lord Wansford's brother, eh?" asked the Rector. For a moment he was stirred to look out from the diminishing circle of his personal interests. The Groomes were a great family, judged by any standard other than that of active endeavour in an art, profession or calling.

Mrs. Lynneker sat up a shade more stiffly, as if she were already receiving distinguished guests.

"He's an invalid, isn't he?" Eleanor asked.

Dickie nodded. "Hurt his spine in the hunting field," he explained. "Clever chap, rather, I should think."

His mother was watching him with a new alertness.

"Is Miss Groome pretty?" she asked.

"Yes! I should think you'd say so," Dickie said. He was conscious of embarrassment, a feeling to which he was almost a stranger. "I saw her yesterday, you know, at Oakstone."

"You never told us," his mother exclaimed reproachfully.

"Didn't I? I daresay not. Why should I?" he asked.

His mother was looking at him with an expression that was in some way furtive and a little sly.

He jumped up quickly.

"I'm going to put in an hour or two's work before supper," he announced abruptly.

Why should his mother want him to marry Sibyl Groome?

or any one else? Why should not a man and a woman be friends? It seemed to him, just then, quite a horrible thing that his mother should have looked at him like that.

IX

The inspection of Halton House next morning provided no opportunity for displaying Dickie's calm intention to seek an understanding of Miss Sibyl Groome's personality. If he sought friendship, she, it seemed, sought, and with an equal deliberation, hostility; and her method on this occasion appeared more likely to achieve that object, than the rather childish, transparent petulance she had shown at the Palace.

She made no attempt to snub him by any verbal retort, but she politely and resolutely ignored his opinions. When he asserted that the house was not damp, she listened and made no reply; and a minute or two later turned to Lady Constance and asked her with an earnest solicitude that spoke of a genuine anxiety for her father's health, how they could make quite sure that the house was really dry.

"You see, dear, it's the height of summer now," she argued, "but the house does lie under the hill, rather, doesn't it? And with all those huge trees in the garden. . . . I'm so afraid that in the autumn . . ."

Lady Constance looked distinctly worried.

"Have you ever been here in the winter?" she asked Dickie.

"Once or twice, but that was years ago," he admitted. "I don't remember noticing anything particular. But I think the point is that one can judge by the walls and floors and so on. I haven't seen a stain on the papers anywhere, and the woodwork is all perfectly sound. Damp always leaves marks behind, doesn't it?"

"Of course," agreed Lady Constance, with obvious relief.

Sibyl's only comment was the expression of her inten-

tion to cross-examine Stanger, the caretaker's husband, who had not as yet come in from his farm work. "You can't depend on what Mrs. Stanger says," she affirmed. "Evidently she wants to let the place. I suppose they get a commission or something."

Dickie exhibited no outward signs of annoyance, but he looked at Sibyl with a visible perplexity.

"You don't trust the evidence?" he asked.

"My father's so awfully sensitive," she said, implying that this was not a case for common tests.

"Oh! well, Halton is a dry place, gravel subsoil, you know," Dickie said, turning to Lady Constance. "I remember when I was a kid being very keen to get some clay to make a little pond in our garden, and I couldn't find any in the parish."

"Personally, I feel quite happy about it," Lady Constance agreed, smiling at Dickie as if he alone were responsible for the geological advantages of Halton. "Don't you think, Sibyl, that we might decide . . ."

"Yes, I'll ask that man Stanger when he comes in," Sibyl said.

She was equally firm about the testing of the drains, overlooking Dickie's suggestion that the village builder was a particularly careful and capable man, and proposing to her aunt that a Medborough expert must certainly be called in.

Lady Constance cheerfully agreed to that suggestion. Her manner implied that it was Sibyl's turn for encouragement, and that no one could find any fault with this need for consulting the highest authority.

"Perhaps that would be better," she said to Dickie. "Mead, you know, the man in Long Causeway, is a capital person. He did the Palace before we went in."

"Quite satisfactorily?" Dickie asked.

"I suppose so," Lady Constance said. "I haven't heard of any trouble with the drains."

"Oh, yes, I should think Mead would be all right," Dickie agreed carelessly. "Wouldn't you like to see the gardens?"

Lady Constance said that she would, but Sibyl drifted off

into the back premises to find Stanger, and they went without her.

Sibyl did not look at him as she bowed a mechanical good-bye that might have been addressed to the big chestnut tree on the lawn before the house. She was already seated in the landau and her attention was being given to an insistence upon the impossibility of settling anything until her father had been consulted. Lady Constance, who had just been conferring the highest honours upon Dickie for so brilliantly discovering the ideal house and garden, was charmingly perplexed. Her simple brown eyes expressed her single desire to do anything she could to please everybody.

"But surely, dear," she said gently. "I can't imagine anything that he'd like better."

"You never know with father," Sibyl said. "I think he ought to see it for himself."

"But don't *you* like it, Sibyl?" her aunt asked.

Sibyl looked back at the bright, sun-flecked face of the white stone house and then, with a careless glance at Dickie, standing bare-headed by the door of the carriage, she said:

"It's so self-assertive, so . . . so obviously perfect, that I feel certain there must be *something* wrong with it."

X

When they had gone, Dickie sauntered back through the grounds of Halton House, across the higher of the two lawns cut out of the slope of the hill, past the short range of the conservatories, and then by way of the orchard paddock below the kitchen gardens down to the lane; over the brook and up through the forty-acre field,—sown with wheat that summer,—to the line of great elms that stood just within the wall of the Rectory back garden. From that wall, not more than three feet high inside, at the place where the hillock that supported the queen of the elms,

swelled against the stonework, he could see the whole stretch of the Halton House grounds climbing the rise on the other side of the little valley,—the lawns and flower beds just visible here and there between the trees, as an advertisement to the stranger that this was indeed a garden and not a wood. Only the kitchen garden raking up the slope and neatly enclosed within its ten-foot-high brick wall, was bare of forest trees.

Dickie had often before stood under that big elm, and looked across at those grounds. The place and the view were more especially associated in his mind with that stage in his brother's courtship of Helen Leake, at which Edward was suffering the torture of what he had construed as a final refusal of his advances. Dickie remembered his own impatience during that period. He had seen the affair then as utterly futile and stupid. He had been sure that nothing but his brother's lack of initiative had been responsible for Helen's apparent coolness.

This morning Dickie was less certain of the validity of that judgment. It came to him as an entirely new thought that it was impossible to win the liking of a woman by any exhibition of one's abilities or desires. If she didn't like you, she didn't, and that was the end of it. He had never in all his life consciously set out to attract the liking of any one, man or woman. Many people had liked him; such diverse individuals, for instance, as Lessing, or Martyn, or dear old Bradshaw, who was now a highly successful "society entertainer." But it appeared to Dickie as an impossible undertaking to win friendship by any deliberate effort. How could one possibly set about such an unlikely task?

His mother had often used a phrase that held the suggestion of embodying a method. She had, for example, spoken of Edward's "paying attention" to Helen. But Dickie could not see himself paying attention in that sense to Miss Groome. He had a picture in his mind of curates bobbing about with cakes at a tea-party; of insinuating smiles and shy compliments; of particularities in dress; "get-

ting oneself up to kill," was a familiar expression in that connection. The thought of such methods as these made him feel sick. To be a "lady's man" was surely the most objectionable of ambitions. No decent man ever had such an ambition.

But no alternative presented itself to him. He could not ape and fawn and smile. He had no arts of attraction. If Miss Groome disliked him, and that inference seemed indisputable, he had no power to change her feelings. He could only be himself; and even if he had the power to assume—what was it they called it?—a "charm of manner," that was not his by nature, he would simply be trying to obtain the thing sought, under false pretences. And it was certain, in any case, that he could never keep it up.

She had given him a hint that morning. She had implied that the cause of her dislike was his self-assertiveness. He found no truth in that charge. He had been called "a cock-sure young beggar" in the city, but that epithet had always seemed to him misapplied. He associated the "cock-sure" with the boast of knowledge. He himself never expressed certain opinions unless the grounds for his assertions were above suspicion.

A sudden, unusual spasm of annoyance shot through him; and he savagely kicked at the stone wall of the Rectory garden. Damn it, did women admire diffidence and cringing? If so, he was out of the running. Surely, no one could call him self-assertive. He did not bounce or bully people. What he did do, how he appeared to other people, he had no idea. He had never considered those things, never had any tendency to introspection. And the only remedy for any such difficult perplexity as this which was now besetting him, the remedy of work, appeared for once distasteful.

He decided it might be well to avoid meeting Miss Groome again, and then reflected that he was doing exactly what Edward had done when he had gloomily determined to become a missionary. Perhaps Edward had been justified, after all. There was no initiative to take in ap-

proaching a woman who for some incomprehensible reason had taken a dislike to you. . . .

He'd be hanged if he was self-assertive. . . .

When he went into the house at a quarter to one he found his mother alone in the dining-room.

"Well?" she said, looking up at him with cheerful enquiry. "Did they like it? Do you think they'll take it?"

"Lady Constance was quite ecstatic about it," he said.

"Wasn't Miss Groome?" his mother asked.

"She said that it was 'so obviously perfect that she was sure there must be something wrong with it,' whatever that may mean," Dickie replied.

His mother had been writing letters and she took off her spectacles as she said: "She's quite young, isn't she?" Her faded blue eyes were watching her son's face with a shy inttiness.

"About twenty, I should think," he returned carelessly, and went on quickly: "Mater, would you call me self-assertive?"

She looked at him with a smile. "I should say you had a very good idea of your own opinion," she said, teasing him.

"Does that mean the same thing?" he asked, seriously.

"You are a little overpowering at times, dear," she said. "I shouldn't call it exactly being self-assertive. But when you mean to do a thing, nobody has the least influence with you. Your father used to complain about it sometimes when you were a boy."

Dickie sat down in the dilapidated leather-covered arm-chair, a relic of the original suite that had come to the Rectory when his father and mother were first married. He looked down at the frayed arm, completely worn through now by the claws of a long succession of cats.

"It's no use beating a cat if you want to teach it," he remarked with great irrelevance.

"We must have that chair re-covered," his mother said, frowning.

"Now, a dog or a man you *can* impose yourself upon," Dickie went on.

Mrs. Lynneker was obviously at fault. "You were never fond of cats, were you?" she tried, hesitatingly.

Dickie laughed. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "They're all right."

His mother's face wore a look of thoughtful perplexity. "Has this anything to do with your being self-assertive, dear?" she asked.

"Well, only in as much as it seems to me that women and cats won't stand that quality in a man," Dickie said.

Mrs. Lynneker's eyes suddenly twinkled. "They only pretend they won't," she said. "But what made you . . ."

And then Dickie realised for the second time in half an hour that he was being very like his brother Edward. In just such a manner as this had Edward been wont to trap the engaging question.

"Oh, Lord!" he said, getting up. "I'm slacking about and getting introspective, that's all, mater."

"I should have said self-confident rather than self-assertive," she continued, disregarding his evasion. "And I think, dear, that nearly all women admire self-confidence in a man."

But Dickie had no wish to imitate Edward any further that morning.

"I say, isn't it nearly dinner time?" he asked.

XI

A grim determination to revive his memory of the model that was apparently being thrust upon him, whether for imitation or avoidance, sent Dickie over to Thrapley for morning service the next day.

Edward had got his canonry before Olivier was appointed, but neither Mrs. Lynneker nor Eleanor was sure whether or not he was in residence just then. Dickie did

not permit that uncertainty to influence his plans. The fact of "being in residence" had no effect upon Edward's place of abode. Thrapley was less than two miles from the Cathedral, and he could take his appointed services there with no greater inconvenience than was entailed by the necessity to borrow a curate from his father-in-law for Sunday matins.

"I should like to hear Edward in the Cathedral," Dickie said, and carefully avoided meeting his mother's eye.

He was, as yet, rather amused than otherwise at his own imitation of the methods he had so despised ten years before. He recognised with a sort of tolerant contempt for himself that he was impatient to see Sibyl Groome again, but he believed that he was in no danger of being overcome by her attraction for him. And when he arrived at the Thrapley Rectory, next morning, to find a neat brougham standing at the front door, he only smiled at the quick sense of anticipation afforded him by this advertisement of the fact that Edward would be taking service in the Cathedral and not in his own church.

Dickie was shown by the maid into the Rector's study, where Edward in his cassock was apparently reading his office for the day. He greeted Dickie with a slightly nervous effusiveness, as if he would have been more affectionate if he had not been greatly preoccupied at that moment by the thought of the grave duties before him.

"We heard you were at home," he said. "We were coming over to see you to-morrow. How are you? You're looking very fit." But after one glance at his brother's face, he focussed his attention with evident disapproval upon Dickie's brown tweed suit.

"I'm all right," Dickie returned. "Does Helen go in to the Cathedral with you?"

"She's just getting ready," Edward said with a quick, impatient glance at the clock on the mantelpiece. "We ought to be going now."

"Can't you find room for me?" Dickie asked, and then, noticing his brother's evident hesitation, he went on: "Oh,

I can go on the box, you know. I should like to hear you take the Cathedral service."

Edward blinked uncomfortably and set his mouth into an expression of nervous disapproval.

"Or I can walk, for that matter," Dickie suggested. He guessed now that his clothes and not the capacity of the brougham was the objection against him; but he wanted Edward honestly to admit the fact.

And Edward, secure in the dignity of his calling, might have so far overcome his reluctance to face the irritating argument he expected to evoke, had not the sound of his wife's footsteps on the stairs provided him with a safe opportunity of dodging the unpleasantness.

"Ah! here's Helen," he said.

Dickie inferred that his sister-in-law was physically vigorous as ever, but, certainly heavier. Some big women are light on their feet, Helen was undeniably clumsy, and her descent of the stairs created a mild tumult in the house. And, even so, his inference fell short of the fact. He was a little shocked by the difference he found in her.

"Dick!" she exclaimed on a note of enthusiasm. "They didn't tell me you were here. How splendid! Are you coming in to service with us? Ted's in residence just now, you know."

"Well, I don't think Ted wants me," Dickie said with a grin. "My tweeds offend his sense of decency, I'm afraid. I suppose it would be rather awful to go to the Cathedral like this!"

She surprised him by taking that objection with perfect seriousness. "Oh, I see," she said. "I hadn't noticed. I don't think it would matter for once, would it, Ted?"

"In any case, it's time we went," Edward replied impatiently. "We shall almost certainly be late as it is."

"I'll go on the box," Dickie suggested. "People will think that you're generously giving a lift to a tramp."

"I can't think *why* . . ." Edward began.

"My dear chap," Dickie interrupted him, "because I

haven't got either a tail coat or a pot hat in the world. I don't wear 'em."

Helen had begun to smile again. "Well, never mind," she said. "We'll tuck you away inside where you won't be seen." She looked approvingly at her brother-in-law, as she added, "though you won't be easy to hide."

Edward sighed desperately. "I shall certainly be late," he said. He looked at his wife with an expression that in some way combined reproof and appeal. He apparently lacked the determination finally to lose his temper and go on alone.

"Come along, for goodness' sake," Helen said. "We've never been late yet, but we always expect to be."

XII

Dickie enjoyed the Cathedral service.

In the great resonant space of the nave, only the appeal of the organ,—religious, perhaps, but certainly not sectarian,—had sufficient power to compete with the sense of something eternal in those solemn heights of arcade, triforium and clerestory, ranging triumphantly up towards the high obscurity of the painted ceiling. Edward's musical voice was too weak to reach the depths of that magnificent fabric; and, indeed, the whole service had an effect of being little and distant, the chanting of a small human ceremony, regular and clear, heard far away. It seemed a symbol of individual man's weak control of the forces incorporated in these immense masses of solemn stone, or revealed in the occasional slow thunder that shuddered through the nave when the organ dropped to the tonic of its ultimate, reverberating bass.

There, in the minister, the tiny personification of mankind, presented by the living bodies of priest or worshipper, was dwarfed by its comparison with the play of his idealism figured in the vast reverence of stone, or recalled by a thought of the imagination that had been able to fill that

immense place of worship with adequate music. The little white face of the distant minister leading the service, the mechanically correlated movements of the congregation kneeling, standing or sitting at his injunction, the thin sweetness of the singing choir, were but the ephemeral manifestations of that passing generation of humanity. In the mass mankind was negligible, a mere comment on his own work. But before a generation passed, it left some record of its thought and ideals, even if the record were nothing more than the preservation of so great a work of art as this Cathedral, or the perfecting of a musical instrument. And if it were art that endured, then art was but the expression of a universal aspiration that could reach out beyond the limitations of the tiny, physical body and cast a new ideal in the matrix of the universe.

And somehow, somewhere, always that ideal endured.

Nevertheless Dickie, responding to his surroundings and conscious again of another symbol added to those he had already recognised, was still unable to state his recognition in words, or to frame his thought of it in such a form as should give him any guide to the choice of his future career.

XIII

He and Helen went out by the north porch and found the brougham waiting by the priests' door, but Edward had not yet left the Cathedral.

"Shall we get in?" Helen asked.

"No, let's wait here," Dickie said. He had turned his back on the Cathedral and was peering up without any sort of concealment at the windows of the Palace opposite. The wall of the Palace grounds was eight feet high, and the trees in the garden were tall and thick, but two lights of one of the drawing-room windows were just visible. The Bishop had been in the Cathedral, dim and remote on his throne down the dark perspective of the choir stalls, but Dickie had seen nothing of Lady Constance or Sibyl.

"Just as you like," Helen returned with a touch of impatience. "The Bishop was in the Cathedral," she added. "I expect he'll be coming out in a minute. Probably Ted is waiting for him."

"Yes, I saw him," Dickie admitted, still staring.

"Shall we walk round and let Ted pick us up at the Archway?" Helen went on after a moment's pause.

A light came to Dickie and he turned and faced her "Oh! I see," he said. "You're a little afraid of their finding me here in tweeds, eh? It didn't strike me that *you* would feel like that. Edward, now . . ."

"One must," Helen began, but before she could explain the reasonableness of convention, the anticipated horror was upon them. The Bishop, glorious in full canonicals, came out of the priests' door, followed by his wife and niece. Edward, in his cassock, was immediately behind them, but ranged himself with Lady Constance as they all came up the path under the North Transept.

Helen's blush could have been due to nothing but shame. She looked, indeed, as if she were strongly inclined to bolt into the brougham and hide herself. And as the party approached, Edward's face also expressed, with even greater clearness, his dismay at the awful contretemps.

Dickie felt a sudden sympathy for them, a desire to relieve their very obvious distress, but it was Olivier, who, unconscious of their embarrassment, immediately saved the situation.

He bowed with a kind smile to Helen, and then laid his hand familiarly on Dickie's shoulder. "Tremendously obliged to you, Lynneker," he said. "I think that place will suit my brother-in-law admirably."

"We have quite decided to take it for three months," Lady Constance added, graciously beaming her congratulations. "From the middle of August. There are the drains and so on to be tested, you know."

Sibyl Groome was apparently addressing some disregarded remark to the startled canon.

For a minute or two the Oliviers and Dickie discussed

Halton House, and then the Bishop, by way of ending the interview, remarked: "Come over again next Sunday morning, Lynneker. I'm preaching—on a text that will interest you: 'It is expedient that one man should die for the people.' Come in to lunch afterwards and criticise me."

"It's a good subject," Dickie said. "Thanks, yes, I will certainly come."

He looked at Sibyl and for one instant she looked back at him. Her expression was less hostile this morning, he thought. He did not feel at all as he supposed Edward used to feel when he was mutely supplicating Helen for the least sign of encouragement. . . .

The return journey to Thrapley was almost convivial.

Edward having endeavoured to the best of his ability to indicate his displeasure at finding his secularly dressed brother full in the path of an ecclesiastical procession, was now confident that Dickie could not have seen his expression of disapproval.

"I didn't know you had met the Bishop," he said, with an elaborate air of not being at all surprised by the fact.

"Dick is such a surprising person," Helen put in. She made no attempt to deceive herself, and only hoped that her astonishing brother-in-law had not been offended.

"Met him in the train coming down," Dickie explained.

Edward was doing his best to make himself agreeable.

"Didn't you know him before?" he asked.

"No; we just struck up an acquaintance," Dickie said.

"You seem to be on pretty familiar terms," Edward persisted.

"Oh! I went there to lunch on Friday," Dickie said. "And Lady Constance and Miss Groome were over at Halton yesterday. Her brother, Groome, you know, is going to take Halton House for three months. I went and looked over the place with them. They're rather decent people, aren't they? The Bishop and I have got an argument on. He told me he was going to preach at me next Sunday morning."

"You'd better come over to us on Saturday and spend the night," Helen said; and then she met Dickie's eye and blushed.

"Oh, well, Dick, we may as well be honest," she went on, drawing herself up. "You'd be the same if you lived down here. I don't think the Bishop likes us much for some reason or another. . . ."

"You've no sort of grounds for thinking that," Edward interrupted her.

"Well, we do think so, don't we?" she protested.

Edward frowned his disapproval of the line she was taking. "We may not be particular favourites of his," he said, "but I don't see that we have any reason to suppose that he dislikes us."

"In any case, we *have* to propitiate him, Dick," Helen concluded. "You do see that, don't you?"

"It's the very point he and I have been arguing," Dickie said, "the question of expedience. Olivier ought to agree with you, anyway. He says that one is justified."

"And don't you?" Helen asked.

"I daresay that *he* may be justified," Dickie returned, "but I don't think *I* should be, because I don't feel that way about it."

"I suppose you never have tried to propitiate any one, have you?" Helen said.

"Not in the way we meant, perhaps," Dickie admitted.

"Of course, you can afford to be eccentric," Edward put in. "You're not dependent on any one but yourself for preferment." He was doing his utmost to be agreeable, but this young brother of his was certainly a peculiarly annoying person. Now that he had recovered from his surprise, Edward was annoyed by the fact that Dickie should be on such easy terms with the Bishop. To the Rector of Thrapley it seemed in some way he could not precisely define, that Dickie was exempt by some accident of fortune from all the restraints and essential limitations that perpetually harassed himself. It would be impossible for any one in his position to take up that attitude towards

the Bishop of Medborough. And if that attitude were inimitable, it was best to regard it as being unadmirable. "Rather cheek, isn't it, for you to argue with Dr. Olivier?" Edward said, with a happy recovery of the elder brother air that he had been in danger of losing.

"Oh! it wasn't on a matter of scholarship, you know," Dickie explained. "You don't claim infallibility in the English Church, do you?"

Edward smiled condescendingly. "You haven't altered much in the last ten years," he said. "You're certainly the most ingenuous person I've ever met." He had found sudden consolation in the thought that the Bishop was probably interested in Dickie as in some curious phenomenon.

Helen was fidgeting with her prayer-book.

XIV

It required no unusual perspicacity on Dickie's part to guess that his brother's marriage had not been a success. And he did not attribute the failure, as his mother might have done, to the fact that Edward and Helen had had no children. In that *ménage*, children would have aggravated the occasions of disagreement. Helen annoyed her husband. Her appearance was a constant source of criticism. She was careless in her dress, and her rapidly increasing stoutness was, Edward thought, largely her own fault. She did not take care. She ought to diet herself. But her chief cause of offence was that while she did not understand him, she imagined that she understood him extremely well, and was liable, now and again, to commit the unforgivable sin of proving it in small ways that did not affect his certainty of her radical failure to do him justice. Children would not have brought them together, but they might have given Helen another outlet.

And Dickie, even during the course of lunch, proved that he would be Helen's ally, not his brother's. Dickie and

Helen had common ground. Their discussion of Adela's return proved that.

Dickie had said that he was tremendously eager to see Adela again, and Helen with, as Edward thought, her usual inability to understand the subtleties of their social position, had enthusiastically agreed.

"That chap Oliver isn't coming, too, is he?" Edward asked.

"No, I'm afraid not," Dickie said. "I hear that he has done very well out there. I daresay he will be coming over later on, but we haven't offered him much inducement, as far as I can make out."

"Well, naturally," Edward commented.

"You're so infernally provincial, Ted," remarked Dickie.

"That, even if true, is quite beside the point," his brother returned. "The plain fact is that we couldn't introduce this fellow Oliver to the people we know, and his presence would be a horrible embarrassment."

"We do have to consider these things, Dick," Helen put in with an absurdly apologetic air.

"It's too obvious to need statement," Edward said in a tone which implied that any one but his fool of a brother could see that.

The annoying Dickie refused, as usual, to be snubbed.

"Well, that's why I wouldn't go in for any of these polite callings like the church or politics," he said. "They handicap you so fearfully. Don't you find it annoying, Ted, to have a particular circle of friends forced upon you by the accident of your position?"

"I happen to prefer that particular circle," sneered Edward.

"Oh, well, that's lucky, anyway," Dickie said with a grin, and before his brother could find an answer to that ambiguity, he changed the conversation by saying: "When are you coming over to Halton? I think that the pater and mater feel that you have been neglecting them, rather."

"We *were* coming to-morrow," Helen said, as if she would propitiate him.

"Well, why don't you?" Dickie suggested.

"You find it difficult to imagine that my time is pretty well filled up, I suppose?" Edward enquired.

"I daresay it is," Dickie agreed, "but the pater isn't a bit well, you know, and he's nearly seventy-six." There was a note of earnestness in his voice that caught his brother's attention.

"You don't mean that he's *seriously* ill, do you?" he asked.

Dickie hesitated. "He looks pretty bad," he said. "And at that age, of course . . ."

"Why didn't Eleanor let us know?" Edward asked peevishly. "You can't expect us to know these things by instinct. Of course, we'll come over to-morrow. . . ."

"Only don't let the pater see that you think he's seriously ill," Dickie said. "You know how he hates to be fussed over."

"I'm not quite a fool," Edward affirmed.

xv

That conversation with Helen and Edward and the chance meeting with the Oliviers and Sibyl had cut across the mood induced in Dickie by his sense of something permanent in the Cathedral. It seemed, as Edward had suggested, so undeniable that the choice of a profession entailed many restrictions of personal freedom. It was perfectly true that a Canon of Medborough would lose his sphere of usefulness if he permitted himself the eccentricity of introducing his workman brother-in-law to the Precincts. And the alternative of cutting himself off from those surroundings, of accepting, say, an East End curacy, offered no profitable means of escape. Edward was no more fitted for that work than was Dr. Olivier for the offices of a missionary to the Dyaks of Borneo. In his own way Edward was no doubt efficient as a dignitary of Medborough Cathedral and Rector of Thrapley; and if he

was not conscious of being limited by his circumstances, whose business was it to point any other mode of life as in any way higher or better than that he had chosen? No, it all came back to the personal problem. Dickie had no kind of wish to alter the convictions of Edward or of Dr. Olivier, but he could not fail to recognise that their ambitions differed from his own,—differed in kind, there need be no question of degree.

But now superimposed upon the difficulty of choosing some profession that would leave him comparatively free to think and act as he would was another problem that this Sunday afternoon began seriously to intrigue him. If—he began with the hypothetical quality of his assumption very clear and insistent,—if by any strange miracle Sibyl Groome were to overcome her hostility to himself, might he not be driven into facing a whole world of impeding conventions?

His one concession to Sunday attire had been the carrying of a walking-stick, and he cut viciously at a clump of nettles by the roadside as he took a step further in his great hypothesis. If he were connected with the Palace and the Wansford family by marriage what then? He could see only one answer. He must go his own way.

XVI

THE HERMIT

I

DICKIE found employment during the week that intervened between him and the following Sunday. His friend, Levinson, of the Greenwich Observatory, had very promptly answered the letter asking for advice, and had sent him some practical material, "computer's stuff," he called it, that "could very well bear a second check."

"You will not be wasting your time over it," the letter continued, "as we are rather short-handed just now; moreover, this particular stuff is a trifle suspect and I shall be rather glad of an outside opinion. Computers do go a bit stale in the dog-days. You will take great care of it, of course. We have a duplicate, here, but it's terrible stuff to copy."

To the uninitiate it was, indeed, intimidating from any point of view. The Rector shook his head over it with a kind of pleased despair. "Wonderful, wonderful," he said to Dickie. "Beyond me altogether." He was evidently proud that his son should have the ability to comprehend that awful conglomeration of signs, letters and figures.

"I'm not at all sure that it isn't beyond *me*," Dickie said hopefully. "My friend suggests that an induction has gone astray and hopes I shall be able to find it." He was immensely exhilarated by the prospect of tackling an intricate mechanical problem, that was susceptible of a logical solution.

II

He had few distractions during the month of August.

His second luncheon at the Palace, however interesting in other aspects, marked no change in his relations with Sibyl Groome. She took little part in the conversation, and her incidental contributions were not aimed at Dickie, although he gave her many opportunities to attack him on subjects which must have been of far more interest to her than that of the Palace furniture.

Olivier had preached an excellent sermon and was artist enough to be aware of satisfaction in his statement. His plea for expedience had been founded upon the ethic of sacrifice, and he had applied the demand for renunciation in a way that appeared to cover his opponent's argument for freedom. His illustration of the Saviour's superhuman sacrifice of His freedom had furnished him with an exceedingly powerful analogy.

And at lunch he pushed the argument right home.

"Sacrifice, Lynneker," he submitted, "must entail a personal loss. Your bugbear is something we've agreed to call 'expedience,' and it's a bugbear to you because it entails the sacrifice of your personal freedom. To another man, the sacrifice would be the ease of professing orthodoxy. And you are not willing to give up the happiness you feel in your independence of thought and action, although you may be ready to admit that that is the very thing which it would pain you to surrender. Isn't that a fair statement?"

"It's sound enough if you're prepared to base your whole ethic on the necessity for sacrifice," Dickie said.

"Without sacrifice you cannot serve mankind," Olivier returned. "Will you admit that, or are you prepared to take up the cudgels for all that is implied by Nietzscheanism?"

"No, I'm not prepared to do that," Dickie said. "And if I were we should only drift into a perfectly useless argu-

ment. I don't want to argue, you know, sir; I want to understand."

"That's just where he holds you, Clem," put in Philip Groome, who was listening with keen interest to the conversation. "That's where he differs from any opponent you've ever tackled."

The Bishop looked gravely at Dickie. "I suppose that's true," he remarked. "You are a trifle inhuman sometimes, Lynneker."

"That sounds pretty beastly," Dickie commented with a grin.

"Have you no ambitions?" Olivier asked. "Is there nothing you more particularly desire beyond this ability to maintain your personal freedom?"

Dickie was aware that he wanted to look at Sibyl and dared not. "Oh! as to that, one's freedom is restricted all the time in a hundred ways," he said. "One's prevented by all kinds of reasonable conventions from doing no end of things one would like to do."

"Which is no answer to my question," remarked Olivier.

"Well, yes, there is one thing I desire at the present moment," Dickie said. "I am devoting all my attention to tracing a rather subtle induction in some astronomical calculations a friend sent me to experiment with. I'm frightfully ambitious to find it."

The Bishop laughed delightedly, but his brother-in-law had a question to ask.

"Yes, but look here," he said. "What are you going to get out of that achievement; fame, or occupation, or your friend's gratitude and approval, or what?"

"I'm going to get the best of that infernal calculation," Dickie replied.

Olivier shook his head. "If you were a single-hearted specialist, Lynneker, I could place you on that remark," he said, "but as it is, I must repeat that you are a little inhuman."

Dickie found that Sibyl was looking at him with an ex-

pression of faint relief, as if she had already "traced the induction" that had been perplexing her.

"Meanwhile our argument seems to have gone overboard," he said.

"Not a bit of it," Olivier replied genially. "I am answered. If you're an exception to the rule of humanity, you can't be expected to sacrifice yourself, but the rule remains good for me and the rest of mankind."

"Clem sacrificed himself by accepting a bishopric," remarked Groome thoughtfully, addressing no one in particular.

"Certainly, certainly," Olivier said. "It is an arduous and thankless position."

Groome ignored that and addressed himself to Dickie.

"If your astronomical calculations are not too absorbing, Lynneker," he said, "I hope you'll be able to spare me a little of your company when we come to Halton. I find you very refreshing, if I may say so."

"You know, father, you're rather inhuman, too, sometimes," Sibyl said.

III

By the end of the second week in August, it was becoming very evident to three of the four occupants of Halton Rectory that Mr. Lynneker ought to remain in bed. He was unable now to take anything but clear liquids, and often sickened at the sight of the beef-tea with which Eleanor diligently surfeited him. His strength had ebbed noticeably during the past fortnight, and it was certain that his splendid resolution to pretend that there was little wrong with him could not much longer avail to postpone his relegation to the sick-room.

Nevertheless he had steadily denied the necessity.

"He ought not to get up," Mrs. Lynneker insisted, with a tragic air, when she was alone with her two children after supper, one Thursday evening.

"He fell down yesterday," Eleanor commented. For once she was in agreement with the others, for she believed that when her father was confined to his bed, all the care of him would be hers.

"Hurt himself?" enquired Dickie, with a look of pain.

"Very little," Eleanor said. "Fortunately I was near by at the time."

"Quite easy to understand why, of course. . . ." Dickie remarked allusively.

"I should have thought he'd have been so much more comfortable in bed," Mrs. Lynneker said.

"Yes, he would," Eleanor agreed.

"Giving up his arms, you know," Dickie suggested.

"But really, it isn't safe now for him to be about," Mrs. Lynneker pleaded. "Couldn't you say something to him about it, dear?"

"I'm sure *that* wouldn't do the least good," Eleanor said. "*I've* suggested it to father several times; it only makes him irritable."

Dickie got to his feet. "I'll go up to him now," he said.

"He may be asleep," Eleanor interposed.

"He's never asleep when I go to bed," her mother said. "Don't you think, Eleanor, that it might be a good thing for Dick to speak to him?"

"No, I don't," returned Eleanor, and then, as if she had reflected that only by these means might she be able to attain her object, she added grimly: "But Dick can try if he likes. It will probably upset father and keep him awake all night."

Dickie had more confidence in his own diplomacy.

IV

The Rector had been sleeping for some months now in the room that had been occupied by Martyn when he had come to stay at Halton for Edward's wedding. That room had always been assigned to the Rector for a dressing-room,

although it was as big as any other bedroom in the house; but the window faced east,—the only window in the Rectory that had that aspect,—and the room had always been accounted cold in consequence.

When Dickie entered, a little benzoline lamp was burning on a table within reach of the bed, and an open Bible lay on the coverlet. But the Rector was not reading. His spectacles lay across the open pages of the Testament. He was lying on his back, his knees drawn up and his hands clasped together over his midriff.

Dickie brought a chair to the side of the bed and sat down.

“Do you get much pain, father?” he asked.

The Rector did not reply at once, and when he spoke he disregarded the question.

“Your mother and Eleanor think it would be better if I stayed in bed,” he said.

“I know,” Dickie returned. “We have been talking about it. I came up now to ask you what you would like to do.”

“It would be better in many ways if . . .” the Rector began and then drew his breath sharply and shut his eyes. “Always just at this time,” he said after a long pause.

“Partly hunger, you know,” Dickie said in a low voice.

“I don’t seem able to digest milk now,” his father whispered. “Wait a moment, Dick, there’s something I . . . want to say.”

For some minutes Dickie sat quite still, abstracting his attention from the thought of his father’s pain. It seemed better not to watch him, not to interfere in the tense, contained struggle that could not be lightened by another’s help. And presently the Rector gave a deep sigh, straightened his knees slightly, and lifted himself higher on his pillow.

“A little water, Dick,” he said.

Dickie fetched him water from the washstand. On the table by the bed was nothing but a tumbler of milk and a cup of beef-tea.

The Rector sipped a few drops of water and then settled himself back upon his pillow.

"Leave it on the table," he said, indicating the glass that Dickie still held. Then he went on in a firmer voice: "It's these horrible functions of ours, Dick, that are so much trouble. I couldn't let Eleanor or your mother help me."

Dickie understood the allusion. "I will do all that," he said.

"If it wouldn't bother you too much," his father returned.

"Well, rather not," Dickie assured him.

"I can still get out of bed," the Rector continued, "but in a few days I shall be almost helpless." He paused a moment and added: "It's a great relief to me to have you here, Dick. You'll stay until the end? I can only hope that it won't be long."

"I shall stay," Dickie said.

"I can't be bothered with injections," the Rector began again after another pause. "I don't see that I'm called upon to prolong the inevitable, eh, Dick?"

"Certainly not," Dickie agreed. "Unless it would alleviate the pain, of course."

"I'd sooner get it over," his father murmured.

"You wouldn't care to have morphia now and again?" Dickie asked.

The Rector shook his head. "I'd sooner fight it out," he whispered. He had closed his eyes again and there was an expression of faint relief on his face. Dickie sat very still, afraid to disturb what might be a rare interval of peace and freedom from pain. Presently he got up very quietly, but at that his father instantly opened his eyes.

"I wanted you to know, Dick," he said. "The others are inclined to bother me a little. If you could make it quite clear to them that there's nothing to be done. . . ."

"I will," Dickie affirmed.

"And you'll help me with that horrible business?"

"Rather."

"It's only the early morning and last thing at night. I can take so little now. And, Dick . . ." he laid his hand on the Testament open at the thirteenth chapter of St.

John's gospel and smiled faintly as he said: "Hereafter I will not talk much with you."

"I understand," Dickie said. He leant over the bed and kissed his father's forehead.

The Rector put up his hand and grasped his boy's arm.

"Tremendous," he murmured. His fingers clasped that splendid solidity as if he found support in Dickie's strength. Then he relaxed his hold, and having said good-bye to the comforting world of flesh, settled himself down to the immense struggle of leaving it.

But so tenacious of life were these Lynnekers that nearly a month of endurance was still interposed between him and release. And if that night the Rector appeared to have entered upon the last phase of his withdrawal from the interests of living, he was yet to demonstrate on more than one occasion that the world claimed an attention that he could not or would not render to the common routine of his immediate contact with the world.

v

Fate had treated him consistently. For thirty years it had encouraged him to build up a defence between himself and his family; and now had given him the opportunity to close his elaborately constructed shell at will with the seal of silence.

In the darkness of his own detached personality he could exclude all interference save the drag of long physical pain. He was freed, at last, from the irk of responsibility. Dick could be trusted to shoulder all the care of his mother and sister; and the burden would not handicap him. He had the strength that comes to those who look outwards upon the world; his mind was not fretted and tired by the struggle with life. He could give out of his abundance and desire no return. He might fail to enjoy the intenser joys of the poet, those thrilling ecstasies that the Rector himself had known; that Edward and probably Latimer also

touched at great moments ; but Dick, who never seemed to seek for happiness, would surely find it. He would not know the misery of aspirations he had not the strength and consistency to fulfil. His steady ability and self-reliance were weapons that gave him invulnerability.

His mother had something of the same qualities. She was far weaker than her son, she could be wounded by personal worries, but the wound healed and left no mark. The Rector's soul was twisted by the great scars of wounds that had never satisfactorily healed.

He was aware of the disfigurement now that he had retreated into the shell of his living silence. But he no longer felt the pressure of a tormenting desire to be other than he was. He had come out of action into reflection and, save at very rare moments, he was content to endure his physical pain and give his mind the liberty that had, at last, been accorded to him.

One such moment came to him when Adela came home, but neither Eleanor nor his wife could stir him to any manifestation of feeling.

Eleanor's sympathy had come too late. When it was first hesitatingly offered nearly ten years ago, his shell had already hardened. She had never been able to tempt him into any exposure of the private weakness he had so sedulously armoured.

And he was glad to be alone. No physical pain was beyond endurance ; and now his mind was suddenly, wonderfully, free from the life-long irk of responsibility either to himself or to others. All the travail that remained was of the kind he had mastered in life. He retained to the end his peculiar modesties and delicacies with regard to his body.

VI

Eleanor was still further embittered by defeat. The conquest she had hoped for had proved a downfall.

"There are certain things he wants me always to do for

him," Dickie explained to her, and she realised the finality of that statement. Not only the world, but fate was against her. She had but one source of comfort. God was chastening her for some wise purpose of His own. She was one of those whom He loved.

"But I must give him his food," she protested nevertheless.

"Oh! yes," Dickie said, "but it's no good to force it on him. It only gives him unnecessary pain."

"But we must do everything in our power to keep him alive," she said.

"I daresay, but you won't keep him alive that way," Dickie returned. "Personally, you know, Eleanor, I think it's just useless cruelty to keep him alive, but as a matter of fact, pain and irritation will kill him before hunger."

Some sense of truth within her told Eleanor that her brother was right, but her habitual obstinacy of thought prevented her from any acknowledgment.

"Dr. Price said the white of an egg beaten up in champagne might give him a little relief," she said. "I got the champagne to-day."

"Try it, by all means," Dickie advised her. "Only don't force it on him. Don't annoy him."

"It all seems so dreadful," Mrs. Lynneker put in, with a weak suggestion of fretfulness. In her heart she a little resented the elaborate deliberation of her husband's dying. It had cost her a great mental effort to face the indubitable fact that death was inevitable—not particularly because it was her husband's death that threatened, but inasmuch as her sanguine temperament could not bear to face such an awful and resolute conclusion. And now it seemed to her at times unendurable that many days, or even weeks, must be spent in company with a presence from which there was no least hope of escape.

"Do—do you think it can be very long, now?" she asked Dickie.

"I suppose it might be some weeks," he told her.

That very day the Rector had been moving about the

house, feebly, it is true, and with the mark of fatal illness upon him, but still entering into their life. And already the realisation that he would move among them no more had had its effect. He had submitted to his sentence when he consented to remain in bed, and he was no longer one of them. For Mrs. Lynneker, at least, he was rapidly becoming no more than a memory.

VII

Adela arrived a week later. She brought her two children with her, a little girl, May, of three years old, and a boy of eighteen months, generally known as Nollie,—he had been christened Oliver Oliver by some imaginative freak of his father's. "We'll give him a name that people can remember" had been his excuse.

Dickie drove into Medborough to meet them, and failed to recognise Adela when he first saw her on the platform. The slender, alert, pretty girl of eight years before had grown into a rather thickset, anxious woman of thirty-one who looked more than her age. Her features were coarser and her complexion had become sallow. But when he came to talk to her, Dickie discovered that her eyes were still those of the bright, eager sister he remembered. The young Adela looked out still from those unchanged eyes as if through a mask. Her personality also appeared changed. She had different points of view, different interests. She was not moved by the sight of old familiar things; she nodded carelessly when Dickie indicated the first lift of that thrilling spire behind the Rectory elms.

"Everything goes on just the same, I suppose?" she said, and that criticism of Halton, and, indeed, of England, was implicit in much of her story of life in Toronto.

Dickie, disappointed and a little resentful, was not able to understand that the unchanged soul of the little girl Adela was thrusting out through new forms of expression. But her medium was changed as her body had changed. She

had lived for eight years in a country that had given her no rest from the pressure of life. She had fulfilled all the needs of an exigent husband who had been resolutely fighting his way to independence and power. And she had borne five keen, rich-blooded children, four boys and a girl, the eldest of whom, at seven years old, was seriously considering the problem of his mother's education. He had discovered that she knew simply nothing of such essential subjects as the American Civil War.

Little wonder that she found Halton stagnant.

Even her father's illness failed to touch her very nearly. All she had was given to her husband, her five children and that new urgent country of her adoption.

"Do you mean that he is actually dying, Dick?" she insisted when he had gently led up to the climax of which she had been insufficiently forewarned by Eleanor's last letter.

"It's only a matter of a week or two," Dickie acknowledged and explained the reasons for certainty.

"Well, it does seem very dreadful to die that way," Adela said. "Does he suffer much? But, of course, he is nearly eighty, isn't he?" Her voice hovered curiously between the long practice of youth and the imitative habit of the past eight years. Now and again her accent and speech were frankly American. The quiet, intent little girl who sat so exemplarily on the back seat, turned to face forward on this occasion as a measure of safety, spoke pure American.

"Say, momma," she began whenever she wished to draw attention to some striking difference presented to her by this first uninterrupted sight of English country. Even Nollie, wide-eyed and observant on his mother's knee, bleated *mommie*, instead of *mummie*.

There was little chance for Adela to plunge back into the emotions of girlhood.

Mrs. Lynneker embraced the rather care-worn woman who had been her daughter, with the respect due to a contemporary; and appeared a little shy of the self-contained child who greeted her formally as "grandmum," and who,

having offered a cool mouth to be kissed, remarked on the cuteness of the back seat of the "wagon." "I just couldn't fall out anyway," she said. No doubt it was the one sure thing on which she felt her mother's family could so far be safely congratulated.

"How she has altered," Eleanor commented when she returned to her mother and brother after seeing Adela and her two children safe in the best spare room. "She looks so old."

Mrs. Lynneker, who had given less in her thirty-seven years of married life than Adela had given in eight, thought the climate must have had something to do with it.

"Her eyes still look as young as ever," Dickie said.

"Of course, five children in six years . . ." Eleanor began with a frown of disapproval, but her mother interrupted her daughter with the reminder that she herself had also had five children in almost as short a time.

"She must be thankful to be home again for a time," Eleanor said by way of changing the conversation.

"I don't know; she doesn't seem to be," Dickie returned. "Oliver is doing very well over there now it seems. I think she has begun to miss the inspiration and urgency of her home life already."

"She's sure to miss the other three children," Mrs. Lynneker thought.

"She'll find Halton rather quiet by contrast," Dickie continued.

But when Adela came down alone to tea in the drawing-room she was suddenly full of questions that hinted a tendency to reminiscence, and once she touched a genuine emotion.

"Eleanor, did *you* finish those chair-covers?" she asked, and looked at the covers in question with a faint blush.

"Well, I did *mean* to finish them," she added when Eleanor had coldly returned an affirmative, and then went on: "My goodness, how it brings all that time back. Were you all frightfully upset? I don't see how I could have helped it."

"We've quite forgotten all that time now, dear," her mother said with an air of reassurance.

"Oh, my!" Adela said with a lapse that must have been induced by the thought she had sent to her home in Toronto. "Why, I'll never forget that time as long as I live."

The halting place was to her as a knot that had tied the contrasted threads of her two lives. The blind, reflective finger of memory could pass smoothly along the different strands of either thread, but must always pause to feel the strange contortion of that sudden twisted interweaving.

Mrs. Lynneker found an outlet for her automatic association of events by making a reference to Edward and Helen.

"And what is Mrs. Latimer like?" Adela asked.

"I think she and Latimer got on very well together, although she is so much older than he is," her mother said. "And they've two sweet children."

"I suppose I shall see them," Adela commented. "They're rather swells, aren't they?"

"She had money," Mrs. Lynneker explained.

"And what about Dickie?" Adela went on, and she looked at him with a sudden flash that revealed all the girl he remembered. "Isn't he even engaged? And who is living at Halton House now? He had his eye on that wall all the way as we came past and peered in at the front gate as if he was rubbering at the freaks in a dime museum."

"Adela! what *do* you mean?" gasped Eleanor. Her question referred not to her sister's allusion to Dickie, but to the intention of that last astounding phrase.

"Why, I thought there must be some attraction there," Adela said, and saw that her mother was blinking and shaking her head just as she used to do when she warned them against some topic that might displease the Rector.

Dickie saw, too, and grinned a little sheepishly. "It's all right, old girl," he said. "The mater is very anxious to pretend there's something in that suggestion of yours, but there isn't. Some people called Groome have got Halton

House for a month or two. He's rather an interesting chap. . . ."

"Lord Wansford's brother," interpolated Mrs. Lynneker. "His sister, Lady Constance, married Dr. Olivier,—our new Bishop, you know, dear."

"And who is *she*?" asked Adela gaily.

"Philip Groome's daughter," Dickie said.

"Oh!" commented Adela with great emphasis. "Fancy, little boy Dickie being in love!"

"I'm not going to stand any cheek from you, little girl," he returned.

For a moment they looked at one another with all the old comradeship shining in their young eyes, and then Adela sighed and said:

"Is it really eight years since I went away?"

She had recovered her touch of the old thread, but a minute later her thought was back in Canada again. "I must go and see to those children," she said; and the little Adela, Dickie had seen so clearly an instant before, suddenly vanished, and he saw an unknown woman who was already verging, prematurely, on middle-age.

VIII

The Rector asked for her, next day. They had said nothing to him of her arrival, but he must have heard the unusual traffic that stirred the house, and the sound of little May's pert American voice on the stairs.

"Adela has come," he said to Dickie when the exhausting effort of the morning function had been made.

"Came yesterday afternoon," Dickie replied.

The old man lay for a moment lax and spent before he answered. "I must see her," he said. His voice was still clear and round, but it seemed to rise from some hollow, reverberating place, like the sound of a voice heard in an unfurnished room.

"Now?" Dickie asked, and his father nodded and opened

his eyes for a moment with a glance that suggested an uneasy regard for the decency of his surroundings.

Dickie understood. "I'll have the room done," he said, "and then bring her."

And when she came, the hermit, who lived day and night within the retreat that still remained to him, made a great effort, it may be of reparation, and looked out again at the bright, hard world.

Adela was manifestly startled by his appearance. The configuration of the skull,—jaw, cheek bones and eye sockets,—was horribly defined now, and the image of death solemnly proclaimed its shape under the poor disguise of the drawn yellow skin—solemnly still, for the grin of final conquest was hidden.

The Rector opened his eyes and put out his hand; and when Adela had taken it, gently pulled her down to him and kissed her cheek.

"Little Adela," he said, in his low, hollow voice.

"Yes, father," she murmured. She was confused and embarrassed. She had learnt to buffet life in Canada, but this slow, inevitable dying frightened her. Surely, no one in the new world had ever died like this.

"Are you happy, Adela?"

The question gave her an outlet. She had been harassed by the impossibility of proffering conventional assurances that he would soon be well again, the only consolation she knew.

"Oh, yes, very," she said.

The hermit peered out still further from his retreat. "Tell me," he said.

She told him, first, something of her husband's success. How he and his brother Harry had commanded high wages from the very beginning, and how they had saved and increased their small contractor's business, putting into it every dollar they could spare. But when she paused, the old man showed her that his thought of her happiness was not concerned with business.

"You've been happy with your husband?" he asked.

"With Frank? Oh, yes," she assured him. "He has been so splendid, always. And we've five children, you know."

He turned his head a little and looked at her. "Your eyes look happy," he said. "I'm very glad, very relieved."

He moved his hand towards her again and when she had kissed him, he crept back into the solitudes of his retreat.

Dickie made a sign to her and she followed him out of the room.

On the landing outside she caught her breath, and her tears came in a gush. "Oh! Dick, it's so *terrible*," she gasped. "Will it be long now, do you think?"

"He has hardly altered in the last few days," Dickie said. "He has been living on water, practically, for a week, and not much of that. It's wonderful how he hangs on. His vitality is simply extraordinary. It's quite possible that he may go on like this for days yet."

"But . . . but he's just a skeleton," Adela protested.

"I know," Dickie said grimly, and hesitated as if he weighed the advisability of imparting the peculiar knowledge he had gained as his father's attendant. "But there's so little waste," he went on, rejecting that temptation. "The only energy he expends is mental. I can't help thinking that his brain is going all the time. He's perfectly clear-headed, always, you know, perfectly sensible, but he won't talk. He hasn't said as much in a week as he said to you this morning."

Adela's tears had stopped now and she looked up at her brother with a faint smile. "You *are* so practical, Dickie," she said.

"Well, that's a virtue *you* ought to admire," he returned. "Frank and you have to be fairly practical, don't you?"

"Oh! my, yes," Mrs. Oliver said.

XVII

THE MISSING INDUCTION

I

THE Groomes had been at Halton House for more than a week when Adela arrived; and her comment on Dickie's hopeful peering up at the long high wall and through the bars of the big iron gates at the foot of the hill had been fully justified. She had seen her eldest boy exhibit just the same wistful eagerness, if the object of his pursuit had been other than the one she had immediately inferred as likely to attract her brother.

On that particular afternoon, indeed, Dickie had been looking for a sign. In something less than a week he had come as far as the expectation of some such private favour, although on that occasion no sign had been given to him.

II

Sibyl had descended from hostility to tolerance two days after she and her father had come to Halton.

Dickie had accepted Philip Groome's friendly invitation in the spirit of its offer and had "just cut across the back way," as he explained, without waiting to attend his mother on the formal call she purposed to make after a decent interval of delay.

He found Groome on the broad gravel path that made a little raised terrace in front of the house. He was sitting in a wheeled chair, by the aid of which he could manœuvre himself about over tolerably level ground.

"Hallo, Lynneker; glad to see you," he called out, as Dickie came up from the garden door which furnished a more formal termination to the short cut than the route across the paddock and through the whole width of the grounds behind the house.

He made his explanation by way of excuse; but if Philip Groome had had no daughter, no excuse would have been necessary.

"Don't begin like that," Groome said. "I asked you to come and I shall take it as a favour if you'll come whenever you can spare the time. Every day, if you like, and any time that suits you. When I'm tired of you, I'll let you know. That's one of my privileges as an invalid. When you're greeted by the formula that I'm not up to receiving visitors, you can draw your own conclusions. As an honest man yourself you can appreciate honesty in me. And apropos of that, I shall, of course, be glad to see your father and mother if they come, but I can't be bothered to go to church. It's not because I can't go, but because I won't. Clem accepts the fact that he has married into an agnostic family, and your people must take him as surety for my good intentions."

"My mother won't worry you about that," Dickie said, "and my father is . . ." he paused before he added, "too intent on his own affairs just now to bother any one. You won't see him."

"Scholar?" enquired Groome. "Early Fathers, and that sort of thing?"

"No." Dickie sighed, and sat down on a garden seat with his back to the front gates and his face to the open French window of the drawing-room. "No, he's dying," he said. "It can't be more than a few weeks now. He has known all about it for months, I think; but he sort of made his acknowledgment last night. Took to his bed and admitted practically that he'll never get up again."

"Seems rather fine to you, eh?" Groome asked.

"Yes," Dickie said quietly, ignoring the suggestion of cynicism in Philip Groome's tone. "There has been some-

thing fine about his endurance all through. No kind of pose or appeal for sympathy, just the courage to tackle the whole thing,—pain with nothing but death at the end of it,—without whining and without any sort of help from any one."

Groome smiled. "The point of view of the normal, healthy person," he said. "We professional invalids understand these things better. We know that we're cut off, and that we won't get sympathy if we ask for it. Also we know that your sympathy isn't worth having. We are in our own little world, and we expect consideration from you,—that is necessary to make life tolerable. But not sympathy, if by that you mean any kind of real understanding. What you've just said about your father proves that you don't understand."

"Hm! There's something in that, no doubt," Dickie commented, "but all the same, I think I do understand my father, and he recognises it. We don't talk, now, but I know he knows."

"There are exceptions," Groome admitted in a softer voice. "Sibyl's an instance. She's a child, full of moods, impetuous to a degree, and capable as you heard the other day of calling me 'inhuman,' but she understands. She doesn't criticise or applaud, if you know what I mean. I had a notion you were like that, too, until you told me about your father."

"You put my back up a bit," Dickie said, "so I suppose I was guilty of criticism as well as applause."

"I like your honesty," Groome returned, smiling. "That's what helps you to cut us all up, Clem and me and the rest of us. We *can't* be honest, you know. It isn't because we don't want to be,—some of us, at least,—or because we don't try, but we simply haven't the faculty. We hardly ever know, as a matter of fact, whether we are being honest or not."

Dickie, lounging on the garden seat, with his hands in his coat pockets, and his hat on the back of his head, was quite sure that he was far from being honest at that mo-

ment. Was he not deliberately concealing his purpose in paying this visit, and in establishing himself on the level of a friend who could be expected at any time without the necessity for proffering apology or excuse? Nevertheless, he entertained no intention of explaining himself. He watched the drawing-room window and waited patiently for the appearance of the person he had come to see.

"Honesty is one of the things that it doesn't do to think about," he said. "Directly you begin to question your own motives, you're dead safe to convict yourself."

"I wonder if you really mean half the things you say," commented a voice behind him.

Dickie started and blushed. He had been so sure she would come out by the French window, and he had been picturing her as he had last seen her at the Palace at Medborough. It was a shock to him when he turned and saw her in big suède gauntlets and a blue overall with her hands full of flowers. She was suddenly presented as another person. He had always seen her as something of a finished product, trained and efficient in the ways of society. Now, he saw her as a schoolgirl of nineteen, and with all the immature questions and doubts of a schoolgirl.

"You seem to have got a down of some sort on me, Miss Groome," he said boyishly. "I always seem to rub you up the wrong way."

She pouted her lower lip suspiciously. "You do lay down the law so," she said.

"Clever young man, you know," her father put in.

"Oh! yes, I daresay," Sibyl returned carelessly. "Are we going to have tea out here?"

Her father thought they might as well have it there as anywhere else.

"I'll tell them," Sibyl said. "I'll come back when I've put these flowers in water."

"Like this place?" Dickie asked when she had gone.

"Only one objection to it," Groome returned. "There's too much hill. I can't get up those infernal steps in this chair, you know."

Dickie looked up at the two flights of steps that led to the upper garden. "I could get you up," he said, "but you can avoid them, if you go round by the back lawn."

"Hill's too steep for me even that side," Groome said, and then added: "But I can see you'll be down here fairly often, so I shan't hesitate to make use of you."

"I'll come whenever I can," Dickie returned, "but I've got some work on hand that's taking up a lot of my time, and I have to look after the pater, a certain amount."

Philip Groome smiled. "You, too, have your moments of deliberate dishonesty," he remarked.

"Been five years in the City, you know," Dickie said.

For a moment the two men looked at one another with a perfect understanding of the thing that had not been spoken between them, and then Groome said:

"Did you make any money?"

"Not very much," Dickie admitted.

"But you're going back, I suppose,—to make more?"

"No, I shan't go back," Dickie said. "That game doesn't interest me any longer."

"The alternative being . . .?"

"Well, that I don't quite know," Dickie confessed. "I think I may be able to get a job at the Observatory; as a computer, in the first instance, until I've taken my F.R.A.S. and B.Sc."

"Well paid job?" Groome asked.

"Oh! no, I shouldn't get more than a hundred and fifty or two hundred a year," Dickie said. "But I've got about five hundred a year of my own."

"All very well for a bachelor of inexpensive tastes," commented Groome.

"Well, that's what I am," Dickie said.

He had seen a look of relief in Groome's face when that statement of income had been made. He was ineligible, and the fact had pleased the invalid father who looked for no sympathy from any one but his daughter. But he had also been afraid, and Dickie found a source of joy in that recognition. It seemed to suggest the possibility that Sibyl's

persistent snubbing of himself was not an expression of her real feeling, and that her father had regarded Dickie as a threat to his comfort.

III

She certainly showed herself more tolerant than Dickie had yet seen her when she returned, this time by the expected way of the drawing-room window. She had discarded her overall and discovered a simple frock of green linen that maintained the new girlishness he had found in her that afternoon. But while they were having tea he realised that the difference of effect was not due to her dress but to her hair. The elaborate sculptured coiffure had given place to what the expert might have regarded as an amateur makeshift which, if it concealed the shape of her head, revealed the quality of the beautiful material that had gone to the building of the coronet she had always previously worn.

"Are you criticising the way I do my hair?" she asked at the moment of his discovery.

"I was noticing the difference it made in the look of you," he admitted.

"A difference for the worse, of course?" she said, but her tone encouraged him to say what was in his mind.

"It's not a question of worse or better," he said. "But you look younger with it done that way."

"I *feel* younger," she returned.

"I suppose Connie's maid was responsible for the other erection?" her father suggested.

She nodded. "I felt so delightfully grown up all the time we were there," she said, addressing her father.

"Didn't make you any better tempered," he returned.

"That was one of the things that was so nice about it," she said. "I didn't mind how bad tempered I was. I felt it didn't matter. Whenever I was the least inclined to be sorry, I used to look at my hair in the glass, and tell my-

self that I was quite grown up, and could do anything I liked. Now I'm back in the schoolroom, and I feel that I must be a good little girl again. This," she thrust her fingers suddenly into the loose waves of hair above her ears, "this reminds me all the time that it's my duty to do what people tell me."

"And you don't like it?" Dickie asked.

"To-day I do," she said. "It's such jolly weather and I feel good."

"I shall keep you away from Connie's maid in future," her father remarked.

She sat still for a moment as if she were seriously considering that, and then jumped to her feet and said:

"Suppose we push you all round the garden, dear."

IV

But it was not until the following Sunday that she came out to meet Dickie with a sudden confidence that rearranged their relations and brought him to the verge of that intimacy which might ask for such a private favour as the giving of a sign.

She had not gone to church in the morning, but when Dickie was down at Halton House in the afternoon, she began to cross-examine him as to the difference between town and country services.

"You'd better come and see for yourself," he suggested, and Sibyl looked at her father as if she asked his permission.

"She's been brought up as an agnostic," Groome explained. "Connie's the only one of our family who has taken up religion. She'd take up anything. But Sibyl has romantic leanings. She's been to Farm Street and the Carmelites, now and again; and the Cathedral appealed to her. She'd go oftener only she thinks I don't like it."

"Well, you're generally rather nasty afterwards," she said.

"Merely because I've missed you while you've been away," her father returned. "I was much nastier to you when you took the whole day off and went to that prize-giving at Oakstone. Oh! I know it was Connie's fault; and *you* were uncommonly nasty to *me* when you came back."

"We do quarrel, awfully, sometimes," Sibyl said in an aside to Dickie.

"There are moments when Sibyl and I hate each other," Groome explained. "It's natural that we should. We see too much of one another, and we are both bad-tempered. Moreover, as you have perhaps forgotten, Sibyl was having her hair dressed by a French maid at that time."

"Well, then, I can go to church?" she said.

"Lynneker will be delighted to see you home," Groome replied. "Better ask him to stay to dinner, or will it have to be supper? You won't be home till eight, I suppose?"

"We'll have dinner as usual and call it supper, dear," Sibyl said. "And then Mr. Lynneker won't have to dress. You wouldn't like to go to church in evening dress, would you?" she asked Dickie.

"I don't think I should," he admitted.

V

The service was not, they agreed, a great success. They approached a confidence with that opening before they were out of the churchyard. Mr. Watson, the curate, had no ear for music and never attempted to intone the responses, and as Sibyl put it, "it was all distinctly uninspiring."

Dickie cordially agreed. He had sat with his mother and Eleanor in the Rectory pew on the north side of the nave, in front of the whole congregation, and unable to catch the least glimpse of Sibyl, all alone in the expanses of the Halton House pew in the south aisle.

And their common experience of boredom seemed to have influenced Sibyl to treat him with a new intimacy. When he

suggested that they should go up the "alley" that ran alongside the Rectory garden and back through the cornfield, she assented with the air of joining him in an exciting adventure.

"Oh! yes, let's," she said. "I don't know that way."

"That big, cold church and that dull, cold service made me feel so miserable," she went on, after they had climbed the stile and were walking up the narrow path between the paling that confined the Rectory shrubbery and the hedge of the glebe farm. "And it was so lonely in that big, cold pew." She looked up at him with a pretty droop of her mouth, the pretended discontent of a child. Her grimace was an invitation to some response in kind, but Dickie was afraid to accept it. He had not the gift of banter, even with men.

"I know," he said. "It's been rotten since the pater's been ill. That chap, Watson, the curate, can't intone."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sibyl, and continued after a moment's consideration: "I didn't understand. We don't know any one in the village yet. So that was the curate, was it?"

"Did you think it was the pater?" Dickie asked.

"Well, how could I tell?" she returned. "However, I won't go again until your father's better."

"He'll never be any better," Dickie said.

They had come out of the half darkness of the tree-sheltered alley into the open width of the cornfield, and she could see his face clearly in the early twilight.

"Is he a permanent invalid like my father?" she asked with a charming little air of commiseration.

"No, he's dying," Dickie said. "We've known it for some time now. There's no sort of hope for him."

She made an impulsive gesture with her hand as if she would comfort him with a touch.

"Are you frightfully miserable about it?" she asked tenderly.

"Not in a way," he said, "but you carry the thought of it about with you."

"Oh! I know," she agreed.

"You feel that with your father?"

"Yes; he might live for ages," she explained, "and he might die practically any time. And I do feel a beast sometimes for leaving him, because he might die when I wasn't there. But, really, he'd often sooner be alone."

"They get like that, invalids, I mean, after a certain point," Dickie said. "Your father was explaining it the other day. The pater never speaks now, even to me, and I'm his nurse in a sort of way. There's hardly anything one can do for him."

He looked down at her and she met his eyes with the frank interest of friendship.

"You've been helping me so splendidly with *my* invalid," she said. "He has been so much better tempered since we've been here. I wish I could help you with yours."

"You do," Dickie mumbled.

"Do I really? How?" she asked eagerly.

"I don't quite know how; you do," he said.

They had come to the gate of the field and they stood there for a minute or two, wonderfully alone together in the peace of the August evening.

"I wanted to tell you," she began hesitatingly, after a pause, "I thought I didn't like you at all when I first met you. I—I thought you were stupid. But before that, at Oakstone, you know, I'd made up my mind that you were the sort of person I particularly disliked. Do you mind my saying this?"

"Where did you see me at Oakstone?" he asked.

"I saw you in the hall first, and then afterwards talking to a rather horrid-looking little man at lunch."

"Ellis, the novelist."

"Was it? I've heard of him. Well, it was rather odd, wasn't it, that I should have noticed you particularly, although I often do notice people like that, and try to decide whether I should like them or not. Don't you?"

Dickie shook his head. "No, not like that," he said. "But why have you changed your mind about me? You have, haven't you?"

"Well, I suppose I found out that I was wrong to a certain extent," she confessed, still with the same unconscious air of discussing an abstract question: "But the first two or three times I met you properly to talk to, I thought I'd been quite right in putting you down as rather stupid and awfully self-opinionated. Don't you think you are a little self-opinionated?"

"Other people have said so, too," Dickie admitted.

"You walk over people so," she remonstrated.

"Yes, I've had to," Dickie said. "My brothers and all my family are so frightfully the other way."

"Oh! yes, Canon Lynneker is your brother, isn't he?" she commented thoughtfully.

"Do you want me to be more like him?" Dickie asked.

The light was rapidly failing now and he leaned a little towards her as he spoke. He wanted to be in touch with her through every contact of the senses. He was afraid of losing sight of that new expression of confidence which had lighted her face that evening and reawakened in him his original certainty of some old experience between them. The half-darkness had transfigured her. She was no longer the beautiful woman he had admired at Oakstone or Medborough, an æsthetically charming triumph of physical contours, but the incarnation of some primitive response to all the desire of his life. For that moment, at least, she was a realised ideal, sexless, but utterly beautiful; the satisfaction of every ambition. And he wanted, with an immense concentration of his will, to please and to hold her.

She held his stare without a flicker of self-consciousness.

"Would you try to be like your brother to please me?" she asked.

"No," Dickie said resolutely.

She drew in her breath with a little sharp sigh, and turned her face away from him.

"You will make me so afraid of you," she said.

He leaned his arms on the top bar of the gate and stared out, suddenly moody, over the slope of the opposite hill.

"I don't see why," he said.

"You're so hard," she returned.

"How could I be like my brother?" he asked.

"I should *hate* you to be like him," she said vehemently, "but you might have said you'd try, to please me. I thought we were going to be friends."

"Well, can't we?" he asked.

"I don't see why you should want to be," she said. "I don't see why you should want to be friends with any one. You're so sure of yourself."

"Does that make you dislike me?"

"Sometimes."

"I don't see how I can help it," he submitted.

"Well, then, how *can* we be friends?"

"Why not?"

"You said just now that I helped you when you were nursing your father, but I don't help you at all; no one can. And we can't be friends if you have got everything you want; don't you see what I mean?"

Dimly he did see. She was asking for a sign of their equality. She could not be content unless she could find some lack in him, and she looked for a submission to her help.

"I haven't got everything I want," he said. "I want your friendship, tremendously, and you won't give it to me. I've wanted it ever since I saw you on the platform at Oakstone."

"You must beg for it, then," she said.

"I am begging, now," he replied.

"Humbly?"

"Very humbly."

"Why do you want it?"

"I don't know why," he confessed; "but I do, tremendously."

She laughed, a little laugh of self-congratulation, and held out her hand to him. "We can be friends over our invalids, in any case, can't we?" she said. "It's nice to

feel that we're in the same boat, there. And, I say, whatever is the time? My invalid will be in an awful temper."

"It's barely half-past eight," Dickie said. He had taken her hand and was still holding it.

"We must run," she urged him.

They ran down the lane hand in hand.

"We are being friends, I think," she said shyly as they entered the garden.

"Rather," Dickie agreed.

VI

But the next day, although she was still without the services of a maid, she returned unexpectedly to her air of social efficiency; snubbing Dickie politely with precisely the same manner she had worn at their first meeting.

And after that vision he had had of her last night, the effect upon him was curiously stimulating. In the garden, that afternoon, he realised for the first time something of the naked desire that Ellis had exhibited at the school luncheon table. And the realisation no longer shocked him. Her antagonism had roused in him the lust for conquest. He wanted to be cruel; he wanted to put his arms about her and crush her pride and resistance.

If the opportunity had been denied him, that desire might have increased and conquered him, but her father unexpectedly gave them the chance to be alone.

Philip Groome had made no complaint of their lateness on the previous evening, accepting Sibyl's not too truthful excuses with quiet reassurances of his ability both to entertain himself during her absence and to wait an extra half-hour for dinner.

"For some reason I am disinclined to quarrel with you to-night, Sibyl," he had said. "The delightful freedom of our relations permits every kind of exception to our ordinary rules." And he had given neither of them the least cause to feel conscious of having neglected him.

This afternoon he was less complacent.

"I'm afraid it must bore you to come here so often, Lynneker," he said, as they were having tea. "I appreciate your goodness in wasting time trying to amuse me, but I don't want you to make it an effort."

"Which means that I'm boring *you*," Dickie replied.

"I daresay," Groome said, and then added cryptically, "You'll be all right again, no doubt, when the crisis is over."

Dickie did not follow that; he believed the reference was to his father's illness. "It can't be very long, now," he said.

"Indeed?" Groome commented, and looked at his daughter with a wry smile.

"He has taken nothing but water the last two days," Dickie explained.

Groome's bitterness vanished at once. "Of course," he said, as if he were addressing himself rather than his companion. "In our little world, you see, Lynneker," he went on, "we have no thought even for the exigencies of our brother invalids. In fact, they are our chief rivals."

"No rivalry in this case," Dickie said. "My father demands no attention except two visits of five minutes each from me, every day."

Groome waved his thin, white hand with a gesture of dismissal. "You are answered by your own dulness of apprehension, this afternoon," he said. "It isn't your infernal coddling we want, it's your thoughts; and you've misunderstood me at least twice in the last minute. Take him away, Sibyl, there's a good daughter. I can do without either of you, just now. You both bore me."

Sibyl got up at once. "I'll come with you as far as the paddock," she said.

"I'm definitely dismissed, eh?" Dickie asked.

"Only until you've recovered your wits," Groome returned with a friendly smile. . . .

"He's really kinder to you than you deserve," Sibyl said

to Dickie when they were out of hearing of the terrace. She spoke sharply, as with the authority of a nurse.

"Your fault," Dickie said gloomily.

"Mine? Why?" she asked in the same tone of offended patronage.

He glanced at her hair. "It isn't only when you look superior that you feel like that, I suppose?" he suggested.

"I don't know what you mean," she said, knowing perfectly well.

"I thought we were going to be friends," he returned.

"I don't know that that's possible," was the answer, and then, in reply to his inevitable "Why not?" she went on, "I must think of father, first. I can't give up my thoughts to you. *He* wants them. He has been missing me since last night. That was why he was so peevish this afternoon."

Dickie realised the admission that was implicit in her statement, and, if he wanted much more than a mere understanding that in certain circumstances a friendship was possible between them, he was for the moment content to accept her explanation.

"Yes, that's all right, of course," he said. "I understand that. But I think you might credit me with a little more power of comprehension, even if I was a bit preoccupied this afternoon."

"Preoccupied!" she commented with a tiny sniff of contempt.

"Yes, preoccupied," Dickie asserted firmly. "But I see, now, perfectly well what your father meant about a 'crisis.' I admit I didn't follow him at the time."

"Well," she prompted him, preferring to evade that issue.

"Well, I don't think you need use quite such feminine, roundabout methods with me," Dickie went on. "I'm quite capable of appreciating the situation, and there's no need for you to put on that awful air of the society young woman

and try to snub me. You didn't really bring it off, you know."

She turned and looked at him, then, with something of appeal in her face. "Well, if I don't, you'll be friendly, as you're being, now," she said.

"Couldn't you afford that without taking too much from your father?" he asked.

She wrinkled her forehead in a girlish frown. "If you'd stop at that," she said, "but you won't. You'll be wanting all my thoughts before I know where I am."

"I suppose that's what *he's* afraid of," Dickie added.

"Of course," she said.

For a few moments they stood still and looked at one another with frank perplexity; then Dickie said,

"But nothing will alter the fact that we *are* friends, will it?"

"I suppose not," she agreed.

"And pretending we aren't won't help, will it?" he went on.

She shook her head despairingly.

"I don't see what's to be done about it," she confessed.

They had come to the entrance of the kitchen garden when they stopped to debate this immense difficulty, and Dickie felt that it could not be solved in so open and public a place.

"I think I'll go out by the top-gate," he said. "Will you come with me as far as that? I shall go for a walk. It helps me to think."

She assented without speaking and they climbed in silence up through the long stretch of almost uncultivated garden that was known as "the wilderness." Indeed, they did not speak again until they had reached the path through the wide shrubbery that led to the little green door in the high wall that so efficiently shut off the garden from the road. Up there, they might have been alone in some deep wood.

"Well, what's to be done?" Dickie asked at last.

"I'm afraid we shall have to stop being friends," she acknowledged wistfully.

"If we can."

"We mustn't think about each other," she said.

"But if it weren't for your father, we should be friends, shouldn't we?" Dickie persisted.

"Yes. I like you, now," she said, simply.

"Very much?"

"Yes." She paused a moment before she added, "I think I was afraid of liking you from the very beginning."

"I wasn't afraid. I did," Dickie said.

"Like me?" she asked.

"Love you," he said.

They stood facing each other a yard apart, but he made no movement to touch her. The colour had flamed to her cheeks as he uttered the new word, but she still looked up into his eyes with a beautiful, serene confidence and understanding, and he found himself compelled to go on speaking lest their sympathy should break and give way to embarrassment.

"I've never cared for any one at all like this before," he said. "I never thought I should."

"I always thought I should, but I never have, before, either," she returned.

"But you do, now?"

"What?" she asked.

"Love me," he said.

She nodded and her eyes were full of tears. "I didn't know till last night," she said steadily. And then suddenly she came close to him and put her face up to his. They were both trembling as he put his arms round her and kissed her on the lips; and her tears overflowed and ran down her cheeks.

Then, in a moment, her mood changed, and she released herself with a touch of petulance.

"Oh! but it isn't any good to go on like this," she said as if she blamed herself rather than him for all the devastat-

ing things that had been said and done. "I ought not to have let you say that. It's no good, you know it isn't. I can't give up father for you. I don't want to. It hurts me horribly, now, to feel that I haven't been faithful to him."

"But that's so different," Dickie began.

"It isn't," she said. "You're nothing to me, really. I don't want to see you again. You mustn't come down here any more."

"I shall," Dickie replied. He did not look at her as he spoke, and his voice was so low that she could hardly hear him, but some expression of immense resolution about his whole pose seemed to shake her confidence.

"Well, not to-morrow, anyway," she said with a sudden change from the absolute to the relative that would have been ridiculous if she hadn't been so deeply affected and so earnest.

"On Thursday afternoon I'm going in to Medborough to meet my sister from Canada," he submitted.

"Oh! you'd better not come again, at all," she returned with another accession of confidence. "And, certainly, you must not come to-morrow. I must have time to think it all over. I'm not sure whether I like you or not. You must give me time."

"But then I shan't see you again until Friday," he argued.

"No, perhaps not then," she said.

"Oh! I simply must," pleaded Dickie.

She appeared, then, to be a little sorry for him. "What time shall you be going in to Medborough on Thursday?" she asked.

"About half past two," he told her.

"Well, you must give me until then to think it all over," she said; "and if I decide that you may come down on Friday, I'll wave to you as you pass."

"I shall probably be coming back about four," he suggested, "if you miss me as I go in."

"Very well; good-bye," she said.

She did not look at him again, but turned quickly and ran across the rough lawn, making a straight line back for the house. He watched her till she was hidden from him by a great clump of laurel, waiting, in the vain hope that she might, perhaps, wave him a last encouragement.

VII

And on Thursday no sign was given to him, nor could he deceive himself with the hope that he might have missed seeing her. There was only one place on the wall from which she could have signalled, the place where at the drop of the hill the road had been driven through a cutting, and the ground inside the garden rose to within four feet of the coping. Dickie had played hide-and-seek in those gardens when he was a boy, and knew all their possibilities; and, in any case, as Adela's comment on his distraction implied, he had run no risks. If she had waved to him, he must have seen her.

The contemplation of what he should do next seriously interfered between him and his work on Friday morning. He had mastered the theory of the calculations Levinson had sent him, and had completed the mechanical if arduous work of checking the workings and results. But, although he was not less suspicious than his friend of the answer returned by the perfectly accurate manipulation of the actual figures, he had been unable so far to find the flaw in the logic of any induction by which the data for calculation were arrived at. And to trace that error he must preserve a clear and undisturbed mind.

He wondered for a time if he had not again reached the boundary of his old limitation; if the problem now before him was not just beyond the scope of his ability; but his continued sense of being on the verge of a solution seemed to deny that possibility. In the old days when he had reached his limit he was aware only of a sense of bafflement, of struggling against unassailable barriers.

"I'll go down there this afternoon," he decided. "I shall never get this done until . . . until something's settled."

And, indeed, his visit to Halton House that afternoon did produce a temporary settlement of some kind, if it was other than the one he had expected and hoped for.

Philip Groome's wheeled chair was not on the gravel path before the house when Dickie entered the garden, with a touch of unusual ceremony, by the front gates. The house and the lawn looked, he thought, suddenly blank and deserted; he had become so accustomed to certain indications of the Groome's life there; and to-day, even the French window of the drawing-room was shut.

He rang the bell with an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness that was new to him. He had never before been so aware of intruding himself where he might not be wanted.

The man, Philip Groome's own attendant, who opened the door, confirmed his worst apprehensions.

"Mr. Groome has not been so well, sir, the last two days," the man said. "He told me to say, if you called, that he was sorry he might not be able to see you again just at present."

"And Miss Groome . . ." Dickie began.

"Is with her father, sir," was the uncompromising answer.

Dickie went out again by way of the front gates.

He had received the dismissal that Philip Groome had forewarned him might one day be given. "When you're greeted by the formula that I'm not up to receiving visitors, you can draw your own conclusions," Groome had said. . . .

For half-an-hour or so Dickie experienced all the emotions that he had observed years ago in his elder brother. He was full of rash plans: to force an entrance by calling every day; to hang about the village in the hope of meeting Sibyl; to write an immensely argumentative letter to her. Or, with horrible reactions that did full justice to the Lynneker strain that had so far been hardly perceptible

in him, to resign himself to misery, to emigrate, to do anything hopelessly emotional and useless.

The little ebullition of the Lynneker strain bubbled furiously for half an hour, and then boiled itself harmlessly away.

He had turned to the left when he came out of the Halton House grounds, and he found himself in the Grinling woods, when his own personality rose up and finally reasserted itself. He saw then, with a clearness that he had not so far been able to bring to his mathematical problem, a reasonable and characteristic line of action.

He would make no further attempt to see Sibyl, but he would give himself time, he decided. He would return, as he believed he undoubtedly could return, to the solution of his personal problems, to Levinson's calculations, to his consideration of the Oakstone education scheme, and to the thought of his future, when this terrible aching process of his father's illness was resolved by its only possible termination.

He wrote to Moseley the same evening and asked him if he were prepared to fulfil that promised engagement to exhibit the Oakstone shops and expound the theory of Oakstone's future development.

In his own mind Dickie fixed no particular limit to this period of waiting he had prescribed for himself, but he knew that he would not leave Halton before he had seen Sibyl again.

And deep down in some inspiring depths of his consciousness he knew that he could trust her indefinitely. They were friends and lovers. It was incredible that either of them could love elsewhere, even though they might never meet again.

It was that knowledge that permitted him to devote himself to the search for that false induction. . . .

He found it, oddly enough, a week later, while he was talking to Moseley, in the engineering shop at Oakstone. Perhaps it might be said more accurately that the solution found Dickie. It was as if the answer he sought had been

clamouring for an outlet through the intricate contortions of his objective consciousness, and broke out suddenly into the daylight while his attention was being entirely devoted to another subject.

Moseley noticed the light that so unexpectedly broke over his companion's expression, and being unable to account for it by any brilliancy of his own exposition, said,

"You look as if you had unexpectedly remembered something, Lynneker, but I can't flatter myself that it has anything to do with what I've been saying."

"Not remembered—found," Dickie explained, and he was so full of his discovery that he had to make a demonstration on the spot.

Moseley was a fair mathematician and gathered the essentials of the process.

"What are you doing now?" he asked Dickie later in the day.

"Nothing at present," Dickie said.

"You are so absolutely the man I want here for a mathematical master," Moseley returned. "Is it at all conceivable . . ."

And just at that time the proposition seemed by no means an unattractive one to Dickie. . . .

He received another offer within five days to weigh against it.

The delighted Levinson had reported Dickie's achievement to the Astronomer Royal, and when he wrote was able to say quite definitely that a berth as assistant was open to Dickie at any time, with a salary beginning at £400 a year. Meanwhile Mr. Levinson besought his friend Lynneker's help with a further batch of calculations.

Dickie saw that it was time he decided that pressing question of his future; but one necessary factor for the making of a decision was still uncertain. He had received, as yet, no word from Sibyl or her father. They had shut themselves up within the ample enclosure of their house and garden and were as far separated from the village life of Halton as if they had been in another country.

VIII

Mrs. Lynneker suffered increasing distress on Dickie's behalf as the days went by. He had always been a prodigy, doing unaccountable and unexpected things without asking for comment or commendation, but at the outset of his love affair he had begun to exhibit symptoms which she had welcomed as evidence of what seemed to her an entirely desirable normality. And then he had shut her out from any delightful confidence; while, now, so far as she could judge, the affair was completely over and she had no sort of clue as to whether the initiative had been his or Miss Groome's. If he had been "refused," his mother thought that he should at least betray some sign of the forlorn lover.

She had talked it all over at great length with Adela, and suggested that her daughter should "ask him about it." Mrs. Lynneker confessed that she hesitated to say anything herself. "He *is* so independent," she said, "but you were always such great friends."

"He seems to be just as Dickeyish as ever," was Adela's contribution; but her attempt to pump her brother was quite unsuccessful.

"He only grinned and said that we had imagined the whole thing," she reported.

"We ought to call, you know, dear," her mother said, putting the affair from another point of view; "either you or Eleanor, and I. I suppose it ought to be Eleanor," she noted in a regretful parenthesis, and then continued, "but I don't like to go without saying anything about it to Dick."

"Well, you might ask him about that," Adela suggested.

"Yes, really, I think I *ought*," Mrs. Lynneker replied hopefully; and the same afternoon she found an opportunity and summoned all her resolutions to the task.

Dickie was alone under the apple tree on the back lawn,

and she held him by carrying out a chair and planting it beside him.

"I have so wanted to have a little talk with you, dear," she said nervously, committing herself as irrevocably as she could for fear she should be tempted to equivocate.

"All serene, mater," Dickie agreed and smiled his encouragement.

"It's about our calling on the Groomes," she said.

"It wouldn't be the least use," Dickie replied promptly. Edward, in the true Lynneker spirit, would have leapt at the chance of sending his mother as an emissary, or perhaps as a scout.

"Is it . . . is it . . . all . . . off, dear?" his mother ventured timorously.

Dickie did not pretend to misunderstand her. "No," he said. "I'm only waiting."

"For what?" Mrs. Lynneker asked.

"For things generally to rearrange themselves," he said, vaguely.

She puzzled over that for a moment and guessed something of his intention. "But, Dick," she persisted, "is there any sort of understanding between you and her?"

"Yes."

"But you told Adela we had imagined it all," she remonstrated.

Dickie frowned. "That wasn't true," he said.

"But why . . ." she began.

"Because I don't want to talk about it, even to you, mater," Dickie said. "I've got a horror of the way Edward used to go on. He was never in love, you know; he never could be."

"D. k!" his mother protested in horror. "You don't mean that he and Helen are not happy?"

"I daresay they're happy enough in their way," he said. "They get on well enough, I suppose, just as most married people do, like Latimer, I suppose, and Martyn, and . . ." he looked at her steadily as he concluded his parallel, "and as you and the pater did."

She winced slightly and pressed her lips into a thin line, but she made no attempt at denial.

"It's our fault, you know," Dickie continued, "we Lynnekers, I mean. We've got some decent qualities, but we're vain, and weak and sentimental. We don't make good husbands. We expect such a lot from our wives and they see through us and we aren't worth it."

"But *you* aren't like that, dear," she interrupted him.

"No, I'm not," he said without hesitation. "And so you mustn't expect me to be like Edward, now, mater. I'm not going to make an emotional spectacle of myself in order to get pity or admiration. I don't know that there will ever be an engagement between Miss Groome and me. But even if there was, I don't want it all sentimentalised and . . . and pawed about, if you know what I mean. I'm being a beast, I know, but you must understand."

He paused a moment, trying to collect his impressions into one clear statement and then said, "I hate the business of marriage. I would never be married in a church. I would much sooner have no ceremony of any kind. No third person has any concern in our vows. If they're the proper kind of vows, they don't need to be witnessed."

"But, Dick . . ." Mrs. Lynneker exclaimed in great distress.

"Oh! Can't you understand, mater?" he implored her.

She did not. She never could. In his whole family, every man and woman who bore the name of Lynneker, there was not one who could have understood him.

"Is there any . . . any obstacle . . ." Mrs. Lynneker began apprehensively.

"The greatest possible," he returned. "My own feeling about it."

The resolution of all his vague shrinkings and distastes had come to him as he had been speaking; thrust up from his subconsciousness, even as the answer to his mathematical problem had also been suddenly presented, clear and undeniable. He saw in one unanticipated, unsought flash of vision, that love alone, in all its aspects, was clear

and beautiful until it was soiled by the regard of some one from without. His own mother's curiosity could soil it. There was not conceivably any third person who could come so near understanding as to touch that sacred function in thought, without altering the relation of the two persons who alone were concerned in it. No outsider could ever enter their absolute.

And with that illumination came a sense that Sibyl, too, must have come to the same realisation, and that he would see her again within a few hours. He felt suddenly strong and uplifted, full of certainty that his long waiting would soon be determined.

He left his mother drooping and perplexed under the apple tree, and went up to the wall under the elm, to stare out, as he had stared many times during the past three weeks, at the sloping grounds of Halton House. He could see no sign of life, either in the kitchen garden that was hung out so nakedly on the fall of the hill, nor in the glimpses of lawn and flower-bed, that shone between the trees around the house. But he decided that he would wait no longer, that that evening he would adventure into those gardens without invitation. He was warm with a new certainty that Sibyl would be there, expecting him, eager to welcome him.

XVIII

THE TWO SACRAMENTS

I

HE made no excuse to his mother and sisters for not joining them in the drawing-room after supper. It was just eight o'clock when he left the house, and he had two hours before him. He need not be back in time for the abbreviated family prayers, now taken by his mother, but he must fulfil his engagement with his father not later than ten o'clock. He had noticed a change in the patient that morning. He had only been capable of the feeblest possible effort when his son had lifted him to a sitting posture.

There could be no reason for hurrying, the Groomes would not have finished dinner yet, but Dickie cut across the stubble of the cornfield instead of following the path down to the lane. He was conscious of a driving sense of expectation; he felt as if he had already delayed too long.

The lingering whiteness of sunset had almost faded out of the north-west, leaving only a paler arc of sky on the horizon behind the common; and the harvest moon, in its first quarter, setting towards the south, was but a lover's moon whose light was no more than a guide to the cover of still deeper shadows.

Indeed, when he had come under the shade of the big trees in the Halton House garden, he realised that even were Sibyl out there in the weak moonlight, he might never find her in that big, rambling place. His intuition had failed him in this; he had no certainty of where he should

meet her. Dimly he had pictured their meeting in the garden, but there were a hundred possible rendezvous.

He was full of doubts and hesitations now that he was so near her; diffident and nervous as he had never been in all his life before. Even the thought of meeting her father intimidated him. He was not ashamed, but he was held by his discovery of that afternoon. Above everything he desired that he should see no one but Sibyl that night.

Nevertheless his impatience urged him continually nearer to the house. He was beset by his apprehension of being too late. And he came, at last, stealthily as a thief down the two flights of stone steps and to the edge of the lawn in front of the drawing-room.

The French window stood wide open and a panel of light lay across the gravel of the terrace path. Within the room he could see Sibyl sitting on a Chesterfield, with her face towards the garden. She was leaning forward, her elbows on her knees and her chin supported in her hands. The corners of her mouth drooped in an expression of forlorn despair.

He could see no one else in the room and her attitude and expression seemed in some way to proclaim the fact that she was alone and knew herself unwatched. She had surrendered herself so completely to the depression of her spirit.

She saw him at once when he came quietly forward into the panel of light that lay across the path, and she lifted her head a little and stared out at him. She gave no sign of alarm or surprise. She stared at him as she might have stared at some deliberately provoked illusion. But the expression of misery slowly faded from her face as though the conviction of his presence gradually mingled with the fabric of her dreams.

"*I am* real," Dickie said, standing on the sill of the French window.

She got to her feet, then, with the matter-of-fact air of one who having made a decision has no further doubt as to her future action.

"I thought you were never coming," she said in a low voice, and put up her hand to warn him that he, too, must be very quiet.

"We can't talk here," she went on in a whisper. "Go up the garden—to the top gate—I'll come to you, there, in a few minutes."

He held out his hand to her, but she shook her head with a little frown; and then nodded imperatively and framed the word "Go" with her lips.

He looked at her doubtfully for a moment, and then turned back into the weak moonlight.

He did not go up to the top gate. He waited for her under the trees at the head of the first flight of steps. He was afraid to go too far away from the house. He had not been able to guess her intention; he wondered whether she had dismissed him by a trick because she dared not face his pleading. Perhaps she had thought that he might insist on seeing her father.

He was full of a great impatience. It seemed to him that he was on the verge of some wonderful realisation of himself and of life, that might yet be for ever hidden from him. He believed that if he did not see Sibyl that evening, she would be finally lost to him. He had lost his confidence in her and in himself. The night and the garden gave him no sense of tangible, ductible realities. He was weak with the feebleness of the dreamer furiously opposing and defeated by gossamer. Only Sibyl was real to him and while he despairingly desired her presence, he felt powerless to find her or to command her if she could be found.

And over all, the consciousness that he had no time to spare continually fretted him. Nothing must prevent him from being back at the Rectory by ten o'clock. That appointment with his father was an essential, sacred thing; he felt that not even this meeting with Sibyl must interfere with that. He took out his watch but it was too dark to see the time under the trees, and as he made a furtive movement down the steps towards a clear patch of

moonlight, he heard the grave deliberate toll of the church clock striking nine. The sound of it came to him as the sound of a warning, as a solemn voice that had answered his question and cautioned him that no more than an hour of his time remained.

He was at the foot of the steps when he saw Sibyl come suddenly out into the panel of lamplight that was splayed across the gravel of the terrace path.

And when she had come to him, without reproof for disobeying her command, and had silently put her hand in his, his sense of urgency and doubt vanished, fading out of his mind as the last vibration of the church bell throbbed mournfully into silence. . . .

She did not speak until they were at the top of the second flight of steps and out of earshot of the house.

"I want to tell you, dear," she said, then. "Listen to me before you say anything. You've got to agree, you know, before we can decide anything. Let's go up to the top of the garden. I shall feel safer there, and it's where we parted last time. So much has happened since then."

He pressed her hand. "I won't interrupt," he said. "Go on."

"You see," she began, "I've had the most awful time with father since I saw you, how long ago is it?"

"Rather more than a fortnight," he said.

"It seems years," she commented, and went on: "He knew, of course, directly I got back to him about you and me, and he began to talk to me about it at once. He said that he wouldn't attempt to stop my marrying you if I wanted to, but at the same time he made it absolutely impossible. He didn't explain at all,—you know his way,—but he just made me feel that I was throwing him over. He pretended in a way not to mind, but . . . well, how could I desert him like that?"

"And the next day we talked it all over in a much more friendly way. It's my thought for him he wants. He has always said that. You know, dear, don't you, how he talks of being so alone? And I couldn't do any-

thing, I thought, except make up my mind to forget all about you. I don't see that I could have decided to do anything else, then? So we agreed about it, and I promised, and kept out of your way when you went in to Medborough that day, and father told Hanson that he wouldn't see you if you called. And I did try most frightfully hard to forget all about you. But, oh! Dickie, of course, I couldn't; and it kept on getting worse and worse every day. Sometimes I would be all right for quite a long time and then I wouldn't; and every time I thought of you, father knew, and even if he didn't say anything, I knew that he was hurt.

"Well, it finished this afternoon, really. He gave me two alternatives. He said either I must give him up or you. He said we would go to the Riviera for the winter if I gave you up, and that I must decide one way or the other before to-morrow. That was just before dinner,—only we didn't have any. He was taken up to his own room and I couldn't eat anything. I just sat in the drawing-room and longed for you. I was sure you would come, and then when you did come, I didn't believe it was you, at first. But that settled it." She squeezed his hand very tightly as she continued, "I went straight up and told him. I simply said that it wasn't a question of alternatives at all, that I could no more help thinking of you than I could help breathing."

They had come, now, to the overgrown garden at the top of the hill, and as she made her last confession, he could just see her face as a vague light against the darkness. "What can I do, Dickie?" she pleaded. "You have always been so certain about everything; be certain now."

He drew her close to him and bent down till his cheek lay against hers.

"There isn't anything to be certain about," he said. "You can't help yourself. You've just said that you haven't any choice. If your father only wanted your attendance, or wanted you as a nurse, it would be another thing, wouldn't it? But he wants your thoughts and you can't give them

to him. I am sorry for him, but he has got to give you up. I expect he has done it already. He must know well enough that he has lost you."

"But isn't it my duty . . . ?" she whispered.

"That doesn't mean anything," Dickie said. "You're not thinking of us and him; you're thinking of some idea of duty that doesn't apply to us three. He wants too much from you; if he wanted less you might feel that you ought to give it to him. But he wants something you *can't* give."

He knew that his thought had not been expressed, but he knew, also, that she understood. The figures of his own father and of Philip Groome were there with them as a tragic presentiment of inevitable failure. Neither could give himself by thrusting out into life, and neither could draw life down and back into his own solitude.

"He *is* alone," Dickie concluded. "You can't ever go back and be with him in the way you used to be. In a way, I think, you've just been born."

"You're always so sure," she said, and nestled a little closer to him as if she found comfort and rest in his steadfastness. "But you are right," she went on, "about this, I mean,—I know you're right. We can't help ourselves, can we?"

"We can't; we can't," he answered her passionately. His time was running out and he wanted to waste no more of it in vain arguments and considerations. In a few minutes, now, he must leave her and fulfil the duty he had undertaken. Nothing could keep him from that plain task; but he found no satisfaction in any ethical reflection on moral responsibilities. He had learnt that lesson long ago when he was in the Bank of Medborough, and had attempted to uphold the principle of justice which George Smith of the Loan Company had so obviously violated. And he had discovered that he was not able to arbitrate on these questions of "right" and "wrong"; that no one was able to lay down a universal rule of conduct. All he could do was to satisfy his own sense of what was right for himself; and

refuse to express, or even to feel, judgment and criticism of other people.

"I never tried to fight against my love for you, dear, after that first day at Oakstone," he went on. "I hadn't ever cared before for any one like this. I've never had any sort of love affair. And, now, I want . . ."

She clung to him eagerly. "What do you want, darling?" she asked, and then added inconsequently, "I feel such a little thing."

He drew her down to her knees and knelt before her in the darkness. "I want our love to be all our own. I don't want it talked about and stared at. If we get married, it must be as quietly as possible—and it must be afterwards, if you know what I mean, dear? That legal business isn't for us at all; it's only a kind of registration. Our love hasn't anything to do with any one else. We must make our vows to each other without witnesses. Do you know what I mean, dear? Don't you feel like that, too?"

He felt her heart throbbing violently against his; and they clung to each other like two frightened children. There, in the stillness and the darkness, the world had vanished and they were alone; and afraid; and yet passionately desirous to draw closer together.

"Oh! Dickie, I do love you so," she whispered, as she put her lips to his.

II

The church clock struck ten as he ran back across the cornfield, but the sound of the deep bell, ringing out in the night, held, now, no note of warning,—rather, it seemed, in its slow, deliberate way, to solemnise the fulfilment of a vow.

They were all up when he went in and his mother looked up at him with an expression that was half-apprehensive, half-eager.

"We didn't like to go to bed until you came in," Adela said. "We weren't sure . . . we think he must be very near the end. . . ."

"Are you going up to him?" Eleanor asked harshly, and before he could reply she added, "Where have you been?"

"Of course, I'm going up to him," Dickie said, "now; at once. It's only just ten. It struck as I came across the field. I never go up before ten."

"Have you been down at the Groomes', then?" Eleanor persisted.

"Yes," Dickie said, impatiently. "But what makes you think he is . . . worse, to-night? I thought this morning . . ."

"He's hardly breathing," Adela said.

"Have you seen him, then?" Dickie asked.

"We've all been up to him," Eleanor said. "We couldn't think what had become of you."

Mrs. Lynneker standing timidly behind her two daughters looked anxiously to Dickie for help.

"Do you think, dear, we ought to send for Mr. Watson?" she asked.

"Whatever for?" Dickie said.

"Oughtn't he to have the Sacrament?" his mother pleaded apologetically.

Dickie shrugged his shoulders. "Even if he wanted to have it, he couldn't swallow either the bread or the wine," he said. "And you remember, when he took it a month ago, he said that that would probably be the last time."

"It seems so dreadful," Mrs. Lynneker began and sighed miserably; but her expression was one of weariness and anxiety rather than sorrow. "You don't think we ought to send for Edward?" she concluded.

"It does seem rather awful that we can't do *anything*," Adela agreed.

"Some one must sit up with him," Eleanor added.

"I'll sit up with him," Dickie said.

The three women followed him as he went upstairs, but they did not go into the room with him.

A lamp was burning on the table by the bed, and Dickie went over and stared down intently at the passing emblem of humanity that still confined the spirit of his father.

"Shall I help you now, father?" he asked.

For one moment the Rector's eyelids flickered, and very feebly he shook his head.

Dickie troubled him no further, but went out to the little group of figures huddled together on the landing.

"I think it may be all over to-night," he whispered. "He is still conscious, but he doesn't want to be moved."

"Shall you stay with him?" Adela asked, under her breath.

Dickie nodded and added, "I'll call you if there is any need."

"He might want . . . just at the last . . . to see us, perhaps?" his mother suggested, timidly.

"If he does, I'll fetch you," Dickie said.

"I shan't go to bed," Eleanor announced.

"I don't see that it will help, sitting up," Adela commented. "I could slip into my dressing-gown in no time if I were wanted."

"Well, you may as well go upstairs, now," Dickie suggested. "It won't help to go on whispering out here on the landing. I've got to come up, too, to fetch some work."

He kissed them all good-night, but when he had fetched Levinson's new calculations, a block of paper and a book of logarithms from his own room, he found his mother at her door, waiting for him. She did not speak, but she put out her arms to him and kissed him again with a kind of gentle fervour. He understood that he was still being "an immense comfort" to her. . . .

He had been through a wonderful emotional experience that evening and he was now set down for several hours in conditions that might well have stirred him to strange reflections and visions, but the habit of work he had acquired was too strong to be overcome even by those calls upon his imagination. Within five minutes he had settled

himself at the table and was deep in his calculations. Once or twice he was disturbed by the moths that came and fluttered round his lamp and after one or two such interruptions, he got up and almost closed the uncurtained casement window. Every now and again he would go over to the bed and stare at the grey face on the pillow and listen to the faint, almost imperceptible respiration that still slowly and reluctantly maintained the thin pulse of life in that incredibly emaciated body. Occasionally he would pause when he had conclusively ticked some stage of his calculations, and look up with a sudden softening of his expression and attitude, that had a suggestion of thanksgiving for the new tenderness that had come into his life. But always he returned after a few seconds to the work that lay before him.

The fluttering of leaves as he flicked over the pages of his log-books; the intermittent muttering of his pencil as he decisively cast his calculations into symbols; or the abrupt spasmodic creaking of chair or table as he changed his position, were the only sounds that challenged the perfect stillness of the night. The grey figure on the bed never moved its position, nor opened its eyes.

It was a little after five when Dickie finished the work he had brought down, and looking up he saw that the window was no longer a range of three opaque oblongs that reflected the lighted interior of the room. A greyness was coming in the East; a black silhouette of leaves and branches was just visible against the distant lift of the sky.

He got up and threw two of the casements wide open and was aware that a sweet, cool air was moving outside and began to blow into the room. There was a faint rustling and whispering among the trees, the little consequential stir and chatter of the things that were waking to the dawn.

He rested his elbows on the high sill of the window and leaned his head and shoulders out into the fresh, sharp air. His mind was suddenly relieved from the strain of

attention to his figures. He felt amazingly clear-headed and vigorous, and yet, for once, the slave rather than the master of his thoughts.

And as the sky brightened in the east until the outline of the great elm at the top of the garden began to bulk as a definite shadow against the fading darkness, and one by one the familiar objects of the day grew again out of the obscurity of the night, he had a vision of life and continuity and some half-hidden meaning that lay behind his questioning of the image of Halton Church; of the great Gothic monuments in London and in Europe; of the long succession of his own family through the generations that had left, here and there, a record of their passing on English life; and of that stoic figure of his father who was even then come to a determination of his earthly destiny.

At that moment, all these symbols seemed to him as one, presenting the thought of something that endured throughout all the changing, evolving form of life. The stable proclamation of Halton Tower was akin in some way to the courage of his father's dying, and akin to the boast of a family maintaining its modest traditions through eight centuries of English history. Those different shapes and meanings of endurance all spoke of an inalterable spirit that persisted through every phase of its temporary celebrations. He, himself, had come to the beginning of a century that was great with the promise of development. But that promise, however splendidly fulfilled whether by its social or merely mechanical progress, could reach but one more phase in the long movement. And no stage must be judged as an absolute, or even relatively better or worse than the stage that preceded or followed it. Behind all progress and all life was this permanent spirit of endurance, of resistance, of power: endurance to maintain the truth of independence to all material pains and changes; resistance to demonstrate the transience of the image; power to prove that while the symbol may be changed, the

spirit shall endure inalterable to find ever new forms of expression.

That was Dickie's personal solution. He did not seek to enquire whither the spirit tended, nor even whether there were, perhaps, some ultimate goal towards which he might ideally aspire. . . .

The morning chorus of happy birds had risen to ecstatic twitterings among the branches of the limes outside the window; the great elm had taken to itself anew its own solidity and colour; and in the east the rim of the flaming sun had come to quench the last glimmer of the fainting stars.

He turned back with a sigh of relief to extinguish the wan flame of the unnecessary lamp, and it seemed to him that a thin draught of cold air blew past him and escaped into the warmth of dawn.

He bent over the bed and then fell on his knees beside it, listening now for the beat of a heart that had ceased, even as in the same posture he had thrilled a few hours before to the throb of a heart that beat so close to his own.

The spirit of the Rector had passed so silently that his son had heard no sound of its last effort to win to freedom.

XIX

THE LYNNEKER FAMILY

I

THE dining-room table was never very steady when it was extended to its greatest length by the addition of two extra leaves; and Mrs. Lynneker's satisfaction in contemplating the largeness of the party sitting down to supper, was rather spoilt by her apprehension of a catastrophe. Dickie, sitting unhappily just at the most untrustworthy junction, had an alarming habit of suddenly planting his elbows on the cloth, and whenever he did that, his mother's attention was horribly distracted from the pleasantly soothing conversation she was holding with Martyn. Dickie was so uncompromisingly solid. The other three men looked slender and fragile by the side of him, even Latimer who seemed likely to prove an exception to the rule that none of the Lynneker men ever grew fat—already he was developing what Martyn had called an impressive local embonpoint. Aunt Mary, who was shrivelling with age, although her eyes still shone with the old fire of conviction, looked as if she would have gone into Dickie's pocket. Only Mrs. Latimer, dark and full-bodied, could challenge any physical comparison with this youngest Lynneker of his generation. And she had, also, something of Dickie's plain habit of speech. Old Mrs. Lynneker, who had constantly to keep watch on her inclination to address her daughter-in-law as Mrs. Blackwell, was intimidated by that self-reliant, confident woman. Helen's solidity was so much less aggressive. Mrs. Lynneker was very fond of Helen. . . .

Martyn, keenly aware of his aunt's anxiety, drew his cousin's attention to it, at last.

"Aunt Catherine is getting a little nervous, Dick," he said, "of your tremendous assaults upon the table."

"Oh! it's all right, mater," Dickie assured her. "It's a bit rickety, but it can't go. I had a look at it this afternoon before the leaves were put in." He gripped the table by the edge and gave it a confident shake.

Mrs. Lynneker's hand went up nervously to her mouth. "Oh! the *épergne*, darling; you'll certainly have it over," she implored him.

"All serene, mater; I'll be careful," he said.

"You forget how strong you are, Dick," Aunt Mary's thin, sweet voice came from the other end of the table with the effect of a little chiming clock.

Mrs. Latimer smiled rather superciliously. "It is the weak people who break things," she said.

"Oh! I don't know; do you think so, Julia?" her husband put in with an air that was slightly apologetic. "We've always looked upon Dick as a blunderer."

"He seems to have blundered to some purpose," Julia commented dryly.

"What'll this post of yours at the Observatory lead to?" asked Edward from the top of the table.

"Nothing particular," mumbled Dickie.

"You might become Astronomer Royal, Dick," Martyn suggested.

"I might," Dickie agreed carelessly; "but I certainly shan't, you know. That isn't my job, at all."

Latimer raised his eyebrows. "Why ever not?" he asked.

"I don't want to be a public functionary," Dickie returned.

"Dick has no ambitions," put in Eleanor.

"Oh! I have," he expostulated. "I'd like to do something useful; formulate some practical theory of the nebulae, or something like that. It'll take me ten years' grind, of course, to get familiar with the detail of astronomical

work. Levinson says he's going to put me on to observation as soon as he can, in connexion with the big star map they're making."

"Eventually you'll go down to fame, I suppose?" asked Latimer.

"It's the means rather than the end that interests me," Dickie said.

"That's pure side," Latimer urged.

"Is it?" Dickie asked, looking at his brother with a complacent grin. "Well, you always thought I was too cock-sure. I say, haven't we all finished?"

Old Mrs. Lynneker sighed as she rose from the table. This wonderful son of hers was no less a mystery than he had ever been. She touched his arm fondly as she went out. "I know you're going to be famous one of these days," she whispered.

"And I hear we are to congratulate you upon another engagement, Dick," Martyn said when the four men were alone.

"Thanks," Dickie said quietly.

"Is the marriage going to be soon?" Martyn asked.

"Very soon," Dickie returned, "and very inconspicuous."

His two brothers were watching him with an evident shade of jealousy.

"I suppose you know Lord Wansford?" Latimer asked.

Dickie shook his head. "I'm not marrying the family," he remarked.

Edward blinked a nervous deprecation of his brother's rudeness. "Do they disapprove?" he asked.

"I haven't consulted them," Dickie returned.

"At all events *some* of Miss Groome's family don't disapprove," Martyn said. "I hear that the Bishop is coming over to take the funeral to-morrow."

"Good Lord, Martyn," Dickie expostulated. "I hope you don't think he is going to do that on my account; or that his approval or disapproval of me would make any difference. I think Olivier's a decent chap enough to come for the pater's sake."

Martyn looked up with his steady, charming smile. "Quite, Dick; quite," he said. "Nevertheless I take it that Olivier does not disapprove your engagement to his niece."

"Doesn't seem to," mumbled Dickie.

"His manners don't improve with age, do they?" commented Latimer.

Edward clicked his tongue and tossed his head. "He is the most extraordinary chap," he said.

Dickie regarded his two clerical brothers with a thoughtful stare. "I daresay you're right," he said, "only, why for Heaven's sake can't you leave me alone? I don't criticise you for being ordinary."

The blood was coming into Edward's face, but Latimer made a praiseworthy effort to keep his temper.

"That's simply a verbal quibble," he said. "Although, of course, if you regard the common conventions of politeness as rot, we are ordinary to that extent. We happen to believe in behaving decently."

"Yes, I know," agreed Dickie.

"And you think your opinion is of more value than anybody else's?"

Dickie turned to Martyn. "Why does everybody accuse me of being so self-opinionated?" he asked with a whimsical smile. "I don't criticise people. I don't want to alter them. But just because I speak as I feel about things, every one accuses me of wanting to shove my opinion down their throats."

Edward's impatience was warming to the flash point, but Martyn's smooth, equable voice prevented the explosion. "I rather fancy, my dear Dick," he said, "that it's because we are just a little envious of certain qualities in you. More especially we Lynnekers, as a family. We are apt, you know, to take the line of least resistance; and it annoys us to see you succeeding so admirably by, I feel inclined to say by the more honest, certainly by more courageous means."

"Oh! well, it doesn't matter, does it?" Dickie returned.

"You can't even acknowledge a compliment decently,"

snapped Edward. It annoyed him that Martyn, taking his own line of least resistance, should have been weak enough to defer to Dickie.

"I say, we haven't altered much in the last eight years," Dickie remarked by way of changing the conversation. "We were going on exactly like this the night before you were married, Ted. Do you remember being frightfully riled with me and upsetting the salt?"

Martyn's suave, musical laugh completed the reconciliation. "*I remember perfectly,*" he said.

Edward smiled his forgiveness. "You always had a habit of getting me on the raw," he said magnanimously. "You do blunder into one's sensibilities so recklessly. Really, you know, Dick, I do think you might have a little more regard for other people's feelings."

There was some look on Latimer's face that reminded Dickie of that old quarrel about the equation. Latimer's position had amply confirmed him in his reading of the printed answer; of the accepted code that had provided him with such a comfortable niche in the established order of society. "Admit you're wrong," his expression said, now; and he was surely justified in believing that no lasting benefit could come from any attempt to work out his own answer to the complicated equation of life. He found a satisfying solution displayed in the world's code, and whether it were theoretically right or wrong, he meant to make his own working agree with it.

II

During the bustle and entertainment of supper no reference had been made to the influence that had thus brought the family together again under the old roof. The two Culver girls, who had gone to live at Bath since the Canon's death, were absent, and Mrs. Latimer was a new, and in

some way an unaccepted, addition to the old circle;—with those exceptions, and one other, it was the same group that had met to celebrate Edward's wedding. But when they were all collected together in the drawing-room, some consciousness of the real difference between this meeting and all others in the same room began to stir in the minds of those who remembered so keenly the place and its associations.

The Rector's chair had instinctively been avoided by them all, until Mrs. Latimer, unaware of any reason why the most comfortable chair in the room should remain unoccupied, deliberately crossed over from the sofa and sat down in it.

Edward, standing on the hearth-rug, fidgeted uncomfortably, and looked at Latimer with a weak, deprecatory smile, but both of them were too ashamed of appearing sentimental to offer any protest. Eleanor, with her hands tightly clenched together in her lap, appeared to be bearing this new trial in the bitterly Christian spirit that had so far supported her through all oppressions and insults. Mrs. Lynneker, with her lips set, was staring down at the floor with an expression of patient resignation. Whatever regret she felt was no doubt more easily to be borne than the risk of a sharp retort from her bold, intimidating daughter-in-law. Dickie and Adela, alone, appeared to be quite unaffected.

"Well," Edward remarked at last, looking at his watch, "Helen and I have to drive home, you know, mater. Hadn't we better have prayers?"

Old Mrs. Lynneker thankfully accepted the suggestion. "Shall we have a hymn?" she asked.

Edward nodded gravely. "I think so," he said, and looked questioningly at his mother as if he expected her to make some particular suggestion.

She understood his thought, and framed the words, "Abide with Me," with her lips, as if she were afraid to trust herself to mention the Rector's favourite hymn.

Edward nodded again. "You play it, mater," he said, as Eleanor made a movement towards the piano.

He rang the bell for the two maids while his mother took down the big hymn book, put on her spectacles and settled herself on the music stool.

But when the maids had come in, and they were all waiting for him, he seemed to find a difficulty in giving out the hymn in the usual form. He hesitated through a long silence of expectation before he made his announcement in the briefest possible words. "Twenty-seven," he said in an embarrassed aside to the two maids.

For the first two or three lines they all sang together with a brave determination to show a fine self-control before the servants; and then the harmony grew weaker as one singer after the other fell out.

Edward had half turned his back to the room. Latimer was bending over his mother at the piano as if he found great difficulty in reading the very large print of the hymn-book from which she was playing with an occasional pathetic inaccuracy. Eleanor stared before her with a set, determined face, stoically enduring the pain of this last act of self-sacrifice she had been called upon to make. Aunt Mary and Helen were crying silently and unobtrusively; and Adela appeared to be lost in some melancholy but not actively unpleasant reverie. Martyn's sense of fitness, no doubt, kept him silent. And so, at last, only Mrs. Latimer was left to maintain the hymn in her full, unsympathetic contralto. She was a stranger—it was impossible to believe that her two children would have anything in common with the Lynnekers.

Dickie, erect and thoughtful, was wondering whether it would have made any difference in his father's life if all this sympathy and emotion had been lavished upon him while he was still able to appreciate it. If his wife and children had tried to understand him better, he might have entered more freely into their lives. He had been proud of them all; and yet he had built himself deeper and deeper into his reserves until, at last, his spirit had crept away

into some final solitude without a word of farewell or regret. . . .

But, in any case, Dickie would not have joined in the hymn.

He had never been able to sing in tune.

THE END

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